

The film: Twenty hand-picked contestants for the Miss India pageant enter an intense month-long beauty boot camp in Bombay. Winning the coveted title means instant stardom, a lucrative careen and freedom from the constraints of a patriarchal society. In another corner of India, young girls undergo physical combat training and learn how to be obedient Hindu women at a camp run by the women’s branch of the fundamentalist movement. As massive change sweeps through India, control over women and their behaviour is at the epicenter of a violent clash between Western modernity and age-old patriarchal traditions. Director Nisha Pajuja gained extraordinary access to women and their families living in two very different worlds – it’s the first time a camera has been allowed into the fundamentalist camp – to craft a brilliant film that captures the choices and contradictions facing young women in India today. – Lynne Fernie

**During and after viewing questions**

1. What agents of socialization are the strongest for each of the two groups of young women?

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| Miss India Contestants | Hindu fundamentalist campers |
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Answer the following questions on lined paper. Follow the usual text book questions guidelines.

1. Do you think beauty pageants in India offer women equality with men? Do they empower women?
2. Many of the girls appreciated their parents for “letting them live.” Should they feel indebted to have not been killed just because they were females?
3. How important are your parents in your success? Do you feel you need to succeed to make them proud?
4. The girls in the Durga Vahini camps change by the end of their stay as each was described as “changing into a tiger.” Use your own analogy to describe what you believe the change to be.
5. What impact has the Miss Universe competition had on Indian culture? Why are people opposed to the pageant? If people don’t agree with Miss India, why do they still watch it?
6. Does Prachi’s lack of control at home lead her to feel more powerful at the camps?
7. Why is the word “westernized” used in a negative way?
8. Prachi felt voiceless and unwilling to discuss marriage with her parents. If you had the chance, what would you say to Prachi’s father? Do you ever feel your parents are on a different page than you are? Explain.
9. How is it ironic that Prachi does not value many of the principles that are taught at the camp?
10. Explore one of the quotes from the film provided below.

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| *“Most Indian women are poor. The beauty industry is a way out for many. Is it also one of the few avenues that offers equality with men.”* Ankita, beauty pageant participant | *“If a woman is treated like a piece of meat and served on a plate and if she is judged by the size of her legs and breasts, then it’s shameful not only to Indian women, but women all over the world.”* Female protester at Miss India protest. |
| *“We think that our Hindu religion is the best and we will always work for India for eternity, meaning if people from Pakistan come, we’re telling that if they come, we’ll mark their foreheads with blood and welcome them with bullets, meaning we’ll kill you and we’ll kill you with bullets. That’s why we learned how to use a gun and we will use it. We’ll use our guns and kill people. We’ll never let them take our India.”* Graduate of Durga Vahini camp speaking about Kashmir | *“I don’t know what she wants or doesn’t want and it’s not important. Marriage is her duty.”*  Hemantji, Prachi’s father |