

**TRANSCENDING GENDER LOCATION: ENIGMA OF BEING IN-
BETWEEN AND TRANSGENDER IDENTITY IN SHOIB MANSOOR'S
BOL**

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Supreme Court of India has declared it crime to be in a homosexual relationships. It has paved great debate over its human approach as well as the rights of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender community. It has blown all the hopes and aspirations of these people into air within a fraction of time. It becomes pertinent to see in this dilemma of in-between-ness of human identity.

Cinema being the cultural artifact of human life has started depicting such hidden or unspoken realities openly to bring all the academicians, scholars together to discuss this so called considered taboo.

Indian cinema has commented on this through serious movies like *I Am*, *Darmiyan*, *Honey Moon Travels Private Limited* etc. Indian Government has awarded *I Am* with National Award. In Marathi Film industry, Rajiv Patil's serious debate over devdasi and Jogtya (man in the service of god) *Jogwa* also critically acclaimed four prestigious National Awards of Indian Government including Best Actor Award for Upendra Limaye who portrays the dilemma of a man trapped in sari that is imposed by some blind faith in the name of religion.

Present paper is an attempt to examine the capacity, authenticity of such gender discourse based on male-female binary opposition in a critically and internationally acclaimed film *BOL (Speak Out)* directed by Pakistani director Shoaib Mansoor.

World is perceived in a context. This context is influenced by the experiences a person undergoes in concerned situations. Experiences affect the identity construction. Identity construction is subject to various factors such as religion, culture, race, ethnicity and gender.

While considering philosophical, social or religious discourse, *gender* plays pivotal role. From this gendered location, same thing can be perceived differently or rather in opposition.

Gender discourse based on binary oppositions, one thinks, categorize or align humanity, society on masculine or feminine attributes. Eventually, these two categorize of male or female gender or sex markers remain inadequate or insufficient to encompass the issues inherent in such discourse. Roughly covering those uncovering and unmappable taboos in the same fashion or negating or rejecting them for their difference as a result of incapacity or inefficiency of male-female binary is great damage to gender discourse.

Law of '*opposite attracts*' is insufficient when a third possibility or third location is not imagined, considered or authenticated. People do not accept the possibility of correction when

nature commits mistakes. They do not initiate the scientific solution or humanitarian compassion. Society rigidly ostracizes them by banning freedom or self-respect to grow as an individual with a difference.

The person who is in between of such binary opposition covering both or ambiguously overlapping or denied access to both is prone to social, religious, psychological and human turmoil. It is very easy to bifurcate others on gender basis, but difficult to live with that difference or ‘*nullified category*’. As the person does not conform to either category, it becomes for him/her difficult to interact with people on various levels.

As the title suggests that *other* or *subaltern* or *minority* is always suffocated or denied to exercise their tongues. The scene in the movie, when Hakim Sahib suffocates his transgendered son, Saifi, in a plastic bag and consequently he is killed, aptly reflects how binary *other* is suffocated and perpetually silenced.

The action of the film is centered in the heart of Lahore. The story deals with the house full of daughters, full with the enthusiasm of life but constrained from flourishing. It is the tale of a girl who questioned the morale that blocks all passages of Light on women of the family and deems them just the child producing machines.

Bol is a roller-coaster of feelings. It is an inquiry into the significance of a human being, be it a woman or a person born with a birth deficiency. It interrogates the authority of giving birth to children without giving them life of dignity. Shoaib Mansoor, writer/director of the film, says:

Having been so blessed in life, I often think of the things that I should be grateful for. The list seems to be never ending, but invariably it ends at one thing... that I was born as a MAN. Nothing in the world scares me more than the thought of being born a woman or a eunuch in a country like Pakistan, where obscurantism has deep roots. It is very unfortunate that we make tall claims, full of pride, about the rights of women granted by our religion and yet when I look around in the underdeveloped Muslim countries in general and Pakistan in particular, I find the ground reality to be the polar extreme. Tragically, our interpretations and application of religion seem to begin and end with women. Leaving the five per cent of the urban educated elite aside, women seem to be the playground (battleground) where we practice a medieval form of religion.

(Blurb)

It suggests how blessed it is to be a complete man. But it is also satisfactorily taken to be a woman completely, as it becomes difficult to be a man and a woman incompletely. It is the major sub-plot in this film. Though it is a sub-plot, it influences the complete tragedy of the family where such a baby is born.

Haqim Sahib is an orthodox patriarch. His traditional mindset and beliefs compel him to give preference to a male issue. In his quest for son, he begot seven girls. This preference for male issue caused great damage to domestic life of his family. He considered his wife only a child producing machine that is unable to produce a son. On the eighth time, he got a son with a birth defect. It is hermaphrodite. He wants to kill the child and regrets “*IS SE ACCHHA YE HOTA KI EK LADKI AUR DE DI HOTI*”. He expects son from his wife next time. Eunuch

comes to him to purchase the baby boy. He does not give any name to the new born child. He does not admit him to school. He takes this precaution to save him from public humiliation and bitter experiences. But his own friend misbehaved with him while giving tuitions. But Saifi is beaten for that.

Saifi's perception of the world and his identity as a neutral or transgender is influenced by his being born as hermaphrodite. Being genderless is different from others. He doesn't clearly confirm either views of male or female. He is a woman trapped in a man's body. But being in the body of man, it is assumed that he should conform to the male code of conduct as well as he should aspire for what a man aspires or dreamt of. But male in mere incomplete physicality corrupted at its origin, his attraction for male is considered as a taboo or unnatural.

Born with a birth defect, his father hates him. The frustration of failure in producing a son as well as father of seven daughters and a transgendered son like Saifi, he mistreats them all. Saifi aspires to be like his father as he has seen the only man in the world. He dreams that his father would give him the love a son deserves. For his biological defect, he is not admitted into the school. Simultaneously, his desires reflect attraction for men like Mustafa who is charming, caring and loving as a woman loves or aspires for a perfect lover or husband.

Zainab wants Saifi to behave like a man. His perception of being man is associated with his father. He expresses:

Mard banana kaunsa muskhil hai, bhawaen har waqt aise rakho,
awaz ko bhari kar lo.. baat baat par ghar walon ko dataten raho aur
marate raho...

His definition of being man is the description of his father's attitude towards his family as he fails to analyze external behavior of a man.

Saifi has developed feminine characteristics. Once he dresses like a young woman, applies lipstick on his lips and observes himself in mirror and says: "KAISI LAG RAHI HOON BAAZI..." He is beaten by his sister, "TUM MARD HO, MARD BANKE RAHO SAIFI MARD KARATE HAI AISA". Zainab and Ayesha impose male identity on him due to social pressure as well as if his transgendered identity is exposed to people, they would abuse him. Saifi tells about his internal turmoil psychological and physical as:

Haan ladki hoon mai.. main ladki nahi hoon to mujhe kyon acche
lagte hai mustfa bhai... kyon mera bhi dil chahata hai ki meri unse
shaadi ho...

It aptly reflects his perception of world from female gender but family imposes on him male identity. He is confused between these two. He accepts male identity but at workplace he is treated as woman and humiliated. He becomes the victim of the sexual aggression of truck drivers. His father fears that Saifi would be forced into dancing profession and people would repeat it with him. His son would become a prostitute. He would bring disrepute to their family. His father suffocates Saifi in a plastic bag and kills him. Thus, Saifi has paid for his transgendered identity first by undergoing the experience of rape and second by undergoing the experience of brutal death.

When Haqim Saab comes to know that Saifi is raped by truck drivers, he kills him. A eunuch reports it the police station and haqim has to pay the bribe. To give that bribe haqim has to pay the money collected by Masjid Committee. Thus first he commits a crime by killing his son and then to bribe police he misappropriates masjid fund.

To conclude, the gender discourse is influenced by social norms, religion, patriarchy etc. It imposes to construct the identity differently based on gender and its utility and function. Here, the identity construction of Saifi as transgender is different from Zainab's feminine identity and his father masculine identity. Zainab's feminist, humanist and rationalist identity is exactly opposite and perpetually in conflict with her father's traditional, orthodox male patriarchal identity whereas Chaudhary Kanjar's *Gender based Utilitarian identity* is completely different as well as brings new perspectives of analysis of feminine and masculine identity on its function. Though, these imposed identity when located in gendered location havoc lives of concerned person, life is beautiful and one should live it in its fullest swing and bloom as a song in movie suggest:

Din parensa hai, raat bhari, jindagi hai ki phir bhi pyari haikya
tamasha hai kab se jaari hai, Is kahani kaun rokega, umra yeh sari
kaun sochega? Saath kati hai ya guajari hai?

Thus, *BOL* deals with the speaking the unspeakable. At one level it seems to a scream that awakens one to think consciously, on another level it is mere a whisper that confuses one leaving in enigmatic situation. On different level it highlights the capacity of human beings to come to terms with harsh, brutal and taboo of human life. It cautions all living being to avoid the denial to become ones defense mechanism. It is the need of time to look into the matter without any prejudices. In the race to protect our culture and to preserve our image, human must not forget that people are born differently. It least as a segment of fabric of this society, it becomes an imperative to respect this difference.

Work Cited

1. Mansoor, Shoaib. Dr. *BOL (CD)*, Geo Films: Eros International, 2012.