



“BOL” BY SHOAIB MANSOOR PORTRAYAL OF THIRD GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

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ABSTRACT:-

This research paper throws spotlight on the difficulties of the transgendered people as portrayed in the cotemporary cinema with special reference to the Pakistani movie Bol. The community behavior with them because of their gender identity is highlighted in Eastern society. Its different aspects are selected to explore the height of the difficulties faced by transgender people in the chosen movie. Discourse analysis is used to establish the rationale of the study. The selected movie is analyzed within the framework of Eastern society as portrayed in the cinema. The role of society is the major cause that creates pessimistic environment in the life of Saifi, who meets tragic death by the hands of his father. In eastern societies due to the lack of awareness and education about transgender, they are badly treated as if they are not even human beings. So the major issues are how the world perceives him in the society, and how he will be accepted in the society? To elucidate the problems of transgender, discriminatory behaviors adopted by the society towards Saifi (a transgender child), the main causes of Saifi's death and the consequences of his death on other transgender community are discussed in this paper. By employing qualitative research methodology it is revealed that Saifi is betrothed in a struggle for life; his character is found weak which causes failure to save himself from societal disdain. Actually struggle for survival was a challenging task to show the viewers other side of a coin in case of transgender's issues in all over the world.

Key Words: - Saifi, society, Eastern, Bol, transgender, struggle.

Introduction

Among all the efforts of Shoaib Mansoor *Bol* is one of the most popular movie (meaning *Speak* or “words”) is a 2011 -Urdu language social Pakistani film written, directed and produced by Shoaib Mansoor(list Pakistani film,2011). Gender identity is one of the major issues of the movie which are experienced in the film *Bol*. The title of the movie *Bol* is taken from Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry which describes need to speak the truth. The Rediff News network highlights the struggle between the existing norms as it declares:

*Bol, ke lab azaadhaitere
Bol, yethodawaqtbohothai
Jism-o-zabankimaut se pehle
Bol, kesachzindahai ab tak
Bol, jokuchhkehnaikaikeh le*

Translation:

*Speak for lips are free;
Speak ,this little time is plenty
Before the death of body and tongue:
Speak ,for truth is still alive_
Speak ,say whatever is to be said.*

“Speak up” was the theme of Faiz's revolutionary poem advocating the timeless need to stand up and speak the truth”. (Rediff News, 2011) Shaikh Ayaz in his review about *Bol* said that, not only for the Pakistani society overlaid with its dichotomies and

contradictions that more or less make most societies today but also for the rest of the world, in any place where injustice and exploitation thrives.(Shaikh Ayaz,2011). Mansoor's, *Bol* has its roots in the much-cherished Faizian tradition of fearlessness in speaking up (though at one point, Mansoor gets his elderly character to quote a Ghalib instead) not one's sentiments but views that are larger than one self, something that can transcend the realm of personal to social.

The world generally recognizes people with their proper gender identity, i.e. as male or female, but there are people who are neither male nor female. They are known as third gender people. Such people are naturally born with the characteristics of half male and half female genders.It is a physical condition in which a person emotionally considers himself or herself the member of the other sex. According to Benjamin (2001) “A transsexual is a person in which the sex related structures of the brain that define gender identity are exactly opposite the physical sex organs of the body.”

Bol represents the contemporary Pakistani society. It proclaims breakdown in the Pakistani society. It is about a traditional religious family which faces sharp financial troubles causing loss of ancestral esteem and the father's troubles come to terms with a transgendered child in a society who is deeply biased towards the transgendered.

As in The Express Tribune BLOG describes the overall structure and issues of gender identity in the movie in this way:

Shoaib Mansoor's *Bol* is brutally honest. Based on the stories of Hakeem Sahib's Sunni-Syed household of seven daughters, the movie adeptly focuses on gender issues at large, dwelling on tensions between fossilized cultural practices and new ones, speaking well to tensions underlying many South Asian households.Problems including rape and domestic violence, and attitudes towards transgendered people, featured in Mansoor's kaleidoscopic film perfectly harmoniously.(Express Tribune,2011)

Bol discusses the issue of third gender people in a very heart- touching manner in Pakistani social order. The transgendered people are treated in a very pathetic manner. The director has all the rights for what he wants to present and how; he has done a wonderful job in the movie. The character of Saifi (the only male child of Hakim Sahib) is treated by him severely and harshly at home. First of all as the father of transgendered child has strict and stern biased behavior towards Saifi who suffers the unloved and unwanted attitude at home. The Express Tribune News Network remarks:

“It shows the plight of transgendered individuals in our society, their pigeonholed roles, and their societal constraints. It mocks hypocrisy of the male authority figure, hell-bent on using scripture, circumstance and blatant fabrications to reinforce his authority and maintain his iron-grip on those around him. It shows the systematic and systemic bias our society at large has against female education.”(Express Tribune, 2011)

This is our skill that we always review a film from an intellectual's point of view. The films like *Bol* are for common people, there are millions of such issues which are out of control in our society .One of these issues is the birth of the third gender in one's house, Maybe people are forced to give away their third gender babies to the *Hijras* (eunuchs) as if it is what the GOD's orders by just saying. ‘aeh ta aapnahai hi nai’(He does not belong to us). The learned and brainy people of a society have tried to change the world but it would



not change a common person's life and thinking until we make them understand. That's what the cinema is designed for movies to hit hearts in their own way. For simplicity, we shall call it the usual crisis like environment, culture always has also been, densely entangled. *Bol* offers a vision and strategy for coping with the complex, potentially catastrophic, ecological and cultural changes that we face them today.

Many people from different cultures all over the world worked on the various issues of transgendered people. The conditions of transgendered people in Pakistan and in the East are reported by different people. Jami (2011) has uncovered the conditions of transgendered people in Pakistan and exposed many facts about them. The project account titled with "Conditions and status of *Hijras* (transgendered people) in Pakistan (2011)" describes a number of issues of transgendered people in Pakistan. She is basically concerned with the gender identity and the legal and religious rights of the transgendered people of Pakistan. Jami (2011) explored various aspects of *Hijras* (transgendered) in Pakistan. In her project report titled "Conditions and status of *Hijras* (transgendered) in Pakistan" begins with the contribution of researchers regarding the issues of transgendered in different parts of the world. She feels the need to project *Hijra's* (transgendered) miseries and sufferings in Pakistan as she asserts, "while much is known and written about *Hijras* (transgendered) in India; very little is documented about them in Pakistan" (p. 3). She talks about the identity of *Hijras* (transgendered) and then proceeds towards their legal and religious status. Her focus lies on the general attitude of the society towards *Hijras* (transgendered). She concludes her project in favour of the need of societal positive attitude towards *Hijras*, (transgendered) as she asserts:

"We should understand and abridge the prevailing state of doubt and mistrust. This will help in solving the psychological and financial problems of *Hijras* and make their lives comfortable and productive for society at large". (p. 17)

Rationale:-

Shoaib Mansoor's *Bol* set around Pakistani environment depicting the miseries of transgendered people in our society as portrayed by contemporary cinema. It is relatively grave and sensitive issue to deal with but the director deals with it in a very bold manner. Contemporary cinema has played a key role to highlight the true life style of transgender people in both Eastern and Western societies. Cinema has attempted to show the real mode of life of transgendered people in all parts of the world. Mansoor's movie *Bol* reflects condition of the transgendered community in true sense in the Eastern society. The director has all the rights what he wants to present and how? He has done a wonderful job in the movie, has touched millions of hearts. For simplicity, we shall call it the usual crisis like environment, culture always has also been, densely entangled.

To get the true picture of third gender people in eastern society and the societal marginalization of eastern world, *Bol* movie is selected. As well as to acquire the role of today's cinema in our world, I have employed both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included different writings from the books, Newspapers and Magazines and secondary sources included research undertaken previously on the same issue. The

written form of demonstration of the transgendered people has been a famous source of portrayal for centuries in all parts of the world. Cinema is also another resource of the reflection of the true picture of their lives. It is the invention of the twentieth century and a powerful resource of information and entertainment since its creation. Many movies touch upon the subject of the miserable social circumstances of the third gender but is not a single movie specially made to portray the miseries of the transgendered community. Contemporary cinema has attempted to show the real mode of life of transgendered people.

As every gender has raised voice for its rights and recognition of identity in the history of world, but there is no voice to be heard on behalf of the third gendered people. They have been suffering for centuries throughout the world and are even deprived of survival conditions and have to miserably live since their birth. Although it has been reported by different scholars that transgendered people face great hardships in life whether they live in the East or the West. In the Eastern world, however, people do not know where to place the transgendered. Often these children are misfit in the society, As a result, the transgendered children are either forced by their family to leave home or the Transgendered community takes them away from their parental hostage.

Transgender people face difficulties in all parts of the world: whether they live in the East or in the West; they suffer the same discrimination. Due to the physical chaos of their sex at birth time, transsexuals suffer many hurdles throughout the life in order to get their required adjustment of the error of their birth. They face bias in nearly every aspect of their lives.

Their suffering can be divided into two categories: firstly the miseries at home; and secondly the miseries in the society. Benjamin (2001) disseminated the issues of the transgendered people by discussing as how to guide the people on international level with gender identity disorders. He defines transsexual as a person in whom the sex-related structures of the brain which mark gender identity are exactly of conflicting nature than the physical sex organs of the body.

Third gender are found unable to make others realize that they are also human beings and that they need equal rights, love and care for survival. They suffer “otherness” in all societies and in all settings, as it has been noticed that parents of transgendered children are found the first-grader file discriminator at an early stage. As Whittle (2007) claims in his Research Project and Report that “We found that Trans people experience many problems at home and in their neighborhood with some losing their family support network, their home and friend Ship circles” (p.17).

Theoretical background of the study

The origin of the transgendered people in the history of the world, stating that every society in history has borne some title, function or way of relating to the transsexual, from ancient Canaan and Turkey to India, and even to the present day. A similar inquiry was conducted by Whittle (2010). He states that there are many words in different cultures of the world to describe the transgender. He further argues that the term transvestite was originated in 1910 from the German sexologist. He explored different names of the transgendered people used in different societies of the world. The transgendered call themselves in different terms. Whittle (2010) asserts as:

“This is by no means a complete list of words used by people to describe themselves. Long before Hirschfeld, other cultures had developed their own terminologies to describe 'trans'



people. From the Hijra of India, to the Fa'afafine of Polynesia, the lady boys and the tomboys of Thailand, and the Takatāpui of New Zealand, there are a myriad of words used by trans people to describe themselves.” (p.7)

In a research project and report commissioned Nasir (2013) quotes Sahiba, the head of the transgender people in Bahawalpur, who shares her discussion in this way:

We learned that in some cases, if the parents of a particular transgender person don't leave them, they still feel like social outcasts and join the transgender community by their own will. They feel free amongst their own kind. This way, they are able to stand as a family and survive. (2013)

Transgendered people are neither acceptable in any job nor granted educational rights. Many a time, the excuse of not employing them is as weak as not being able to bear the burden of seeing a so-called abnormal person among them. This is the basic reason for transgendered people practically leave the homes and most members of this community have only one option for survival, that of the life of prostitution. It is very strange that people find it easier to accept homosexuals and lesbians but they are strangely uncomfortable when it comes to Transgendered. Nasir further mentions about the working conditions of transgendered people in Pakistani society in this way:

They face workplace discrimination. People don't offer them jobs at home because they are considered hateful and somewhat dirty to touch. They are confused about which attire to wear in order to observe the dress code of certain workplaces. Eventually their need for the basic necessities of life forces them into begging and prostitution.(2013)

According to Looking glass self idea in the *Bol* under these circumstances, Saifi starts his life. At a very early stage of his life he realizes that he is different from the other members of the family. He thinks himself as another and feels that his feelings are like female gender male body. For such type of people Fatima (2008) quotes Doctor as: “a transsexual is a male or female who has a lifelong feeling of being trapped in the wrong body” (pp.135-136).At home, Saifi plays and spends most of his time with his sisters but he realized that she is neither their sister nor brother. Fatima (2008) defines these people in our society as: “In Pakistani culture, a male to female gender dysphoria is a physically male or intersex person who is considered a member of the third sex” (p.137).The most important of the psychoanalytic writers to build up a theory of transgenderism was Stekel (1930). He invented the term 'paraphilia' to explain what others had simply regarded as a perversion. The section of his book dealing with transvestism was written by Gutheil(1930) who differentiated between fetishism and transvestism. In his view, transvestism was a special form of a force in which the patient's desire for the genitals of the other sex is displaced to the clothing, creating in a sense a phallic female.

Gender is an old term that has been generally used in linguistic discussion to select whether nouns are male, female, or neuter. The challenge was the development of the concept of gender. The major confront to the psychiatric authority came from a new age group of social and behavioral scientists, who defied the supremacy of the medical community. They were experts in the process, challenged the therapy of much of the sexual behavior. It was, however, not generally used either in the language of public sciences or sexology until John Money chose the term in 1955 to provide as an umbrella concept to

differentiate femininity, or womanliness, and masculinity, or manliness, from biological sex.

Identity crises:-

Saifi the victim of *Bol* Movie is also a female to male transgender. The parents of Saifi in the chosen movie are shocked at the news that a third gender child has been born in their home after seven daughters. The egotistical and proud father at once thinks of killing the child many times. He thinks it is a curse to have a child like that; so he makes use of violent behavior towards him. Virtually the transgendered face the problems of having parents who cannot accept them and as a result try to treat them by either beating, scolding, or using other methods which they think would heal their child of the disorder.

Kaneez-i-Fatima (2008) also worked on the same issues of identity of transgendered people living in Pakistan. She mentions three main mechanisms of gender identity. She proposed three separate mechanisms of self. Individual, communal and sexual identities. She defines transgendered people in Pakistani society as “In Pakistani culture, a male to female gender dysphoria is a physically male or intersex person who is considered a member of the third sex” (p.137).

Methodology:-

Jami Humaira (2011) further observes that Pakistani society is the representation of Cooley’s theory of the “looking glass-self” which is supporting the idea that a person’s self grows out of society’s interpersonal interactions and perceptions of others. Butler (1980) states about the gender that any act (performance) of a person is not only dependent upon the gender of that person but it also depends on the attitude and notions of the society towards that person. In the light of Cooley’s theory Mansoor’s movie of titled *Bolis* purely the work of looking glass-self. Hill and Willoughby (2005) further examines the latest studies of the effects of the experience of transphobia at different places. Most part of the research on the subject of the transgender has reported high level of victimization including harassment by strangers on the street, verbal abuse, assault with a weapon and or sexual assault (cited in Lombardi et al.2001 cited in Hill and Willoughby 2005). Saifi also bears the sexual harassment at his work place. He became the victim of sexual assault of the bad people. They tricked and made him the victim of their lust.

Findings:-

The transgendered people suffer the hardships of life but these miseries are never ending, even they meet with their final destination of death. Saifi the protagonist of *Bol* meets the final destination by the hand of his own father, who in the name of his false honor and prestige of his family murders his transgendered child by suffocating him with a shopping bag around his neck. It was quite inhuman to kill God’s creature.

In recent times the organizations have started to witness and report transphobia based murders, although long-standing account of the inclination is hard to calculate. Freeman (2012) in her paper has reported that:

“, the Gay-Straight Alliance Network has published a list of transgendered individuals whose murders have been reported by family and friends. The dates of these assassinations range from the early 1970s to those of the 21st century. Individuals have reportedly been killed in a multitude of countries including Argentina, New Zealand, and Malaysia”. (p.4)



The description of Freeman (2012) further asserts about the world wide murders of the transgendered people in this way: “

“Tran respect Versus Transphobia Worldwide, a research project administered by the NGO Transgender Europe, found that transgendered individuals are currently being murdered throughout every major region of the world.” (p.5)

It has been reported that the transgender people are mistreated by every sort of people in every society. They are abused due to their gender identity. Most of the time these are common people, onlookers, shopkeepers, the drivers, the owners of hotels, and public places at the police of the country. The attitude of these people towards the transgendered develops aggression, hostility and self-ruining behavior amongst the transgendered individuals, both leading all too frequently to death. The report publishes the calculations of the murdered transgendered people in Pakistan and other Asian countries as: “Additionally, 59 transgendered people in 13 Asian countries have reportedly been killed since 2008, with 12 deaths in Pakistan, 10 in India, and 10 in the Philippines (“March 2012, p.5).

Being transgender is one of very serious phenomena. Transgendered children suffer a mental trauma and severe tension from child hood. They are usually found sad and consider themselves useless. One eleven-year-old girl Sadie questioned President Obama’s exception of trans people. Sadie wrote this elegant letter about gender identity published on Tuesday, 29 January 2013 14:44. Their disappointment is described by Cael as:

Trans kids do not have the same admission to healthcare as many other individuals, but Oregon is becoming the first state to cover treatments for gender Dysphoria in children and teens under Medicaid. Beginning in October 2014, coverage will extend to cover counseling, medication to suppress puberty, and other procedures and care to help trans* kids to handle dysphoria or to transition. Medication to suppress puberty can cost in excess of \$1000 a month. Oregon’s steps to help trans* children and their parents will hopefully be followed by other states. Let me know your thoughts in the comments, on tumblr, or email me.

(poetcael73@gmail.com – Cael)

According to Aristotle the fall of a hero occurs due to some weakness or “tragic flaw in his character called Hamartia” (Aristotle, 2000, p. 10). Lack of proper male or female gender and identity is the tragic flaw in the character of Saifi which led him to his tragic end. When the father behaves harshly he feels himself in a complex and unwelcomed in the home.

The life of Saifi is an embodiment of suffering and it lasts at the tragic end of Saifi. All the elements of environment are against him. The constructive forces are weak and critical forces are strong. Due to destructive forces Saifi meets ultimately the tragic end. The tragic flaw in the character of Saifi is his identity crises. He is unable to make his personality perfect. In the very first glance people shows that there is something strange in his personality. People perceive him as a third gender.

Conclusion

Despite all the studies of *Bol*, it is concluded that in the process of socialization the importance of contemporary cinema cannot be ignored, Long before any written document about a social issue published, it is the media and cinema which takes initiative in projecting that issue. So same is the exposure of the transgendered miseries in Eastern society as projected in *Bol* movie through the lives of Saifi in *Bol* transgendered people have

been depicted in this society of the East and it is proved that they suffer with physical, mental, and psychological problems in society. Survival in the world is difficult for them as they are deprived of many human rights.

This research was intended to bring forth two important issues in the eyes of the masses. Firstly; the positive role which the contemporary cinema has ignored in the recent decades. Secondly; to spread awareness among the masses about some neglected social issues. The importance of this research cannot be ignored as it would be helpful in attracting future researchers towards such minute social issues which seems very little but its aftermaths are worst. If we have a glance at various movements in the world there had been two parties and the suppressed classes tried to emerge as a third class creating a third space. The same is true about transgenders who are treated as a salt in meal. This research would be useful in showing a direction to the Transgender to raise their voice for their rights and identity. It would also be useful in persuading the contemporary cinema to highlight other social issues so that the masses may be aware of those fellows who are living miserable lives in multicultural societies such as Pakistan. Marginalization of transgender can be minimized by giving them equal rights and may help in bridging the gap between a common man and transgender.

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