



## BOLLYWOOD MOVIEDOR: RECALLING OF THE SELF

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The post liberalized phase of the early 90s witnessed the globalization of skills, ideas, values and relationships. The spirit of the time has been brilliantly captured and presented in the contemporary Hindi cinema which is popularly known as 'Bollywood'. All glaring changes in the socio-cultural set up would sooner or later find its way to cinematic portrayal. The Bollywood movies of the present decade came as sprinkles wiping out the dusty stereotyped cinematic patterns. In the changing socio-cultural scenario, the role of Bollywood women too has been redefined. With the acceleration of globalization the concept of feminism acquired a new meaning. The feminist movement got doubly recognized, scattering its varying shades in various forms through the verbal and visual modes. The impact can be seen on the changed mindset of the film makers resulting in the redefined image of women on the silver screen. Bollywood women have come a long way, scaling new heights witnessing drastic growth and maturity in terms of selfhood and identity. They have now moved away breaking the shackles of docile and fragile image and are projecting a non-conformist image of Indian women. An endeavour has been made to focus on the women characters that question their conformist folds and attempt to redefine, rediscover and recall their selfhood, existence and identity. The contemporary Bollywood era has shown a phenomenal breakthrough when several mainstream films moved out of the patriarchal construct even while operating within the limitations imposed by the social system. The movies definitely decide the contours of the new face of women in popular Bollywood cinema in future. There are some landmark movies which have become the trendsetter of the changing times thus leaving an indelible mark on

the perception and attitude of society at large. Bollywood has played a significant role in presenting women's issues effectively on screen. It has started depicting women characters in an entirely different manner by giving a wider platform and placing her in the centre in terms of space, freedom and selfhood.

Films as an art form seeps deeper in human consciousness. The message which is coded in the movie in the form of dialogues, actions, lighting effects, sound and sometimes silence leaves lasting impact on the mind of its viewers. Today cinema has double role to play. It not only entertains society but also plays a key role in arousing consciousness against social evils and promoting social awareness. The feminist theories which propagate liberty and equality for women have become the key interests for the film directors today. The post-feminist phase has moved beyond the ideas of liberty and equality for woman. It challenges the set notions of society regarding the position and role of women today. It boldly asserts that woman needs everything; education, career, marriage, sex, motherhood and personhood. Now it is a challenging task for contemporary film directors to break the stereotypes and present women characters with all these dimensions to enhance women's roles and personality. Cinema and society influence each other and the presentation of 'New Woman' on the silver screen has definitely impacted the lives of women in society. They are gradually becoming aware and sensitive, understanding the value of selfhood, identity and existence which are very important for any woman to live a dignified life.

The present paper attempts to explore the notion of selfhood by showing face of New Woman on the silver screen through one such land mark film entitled *Dor*(2006) by NageshKuknoor. It talks about woman in relation to her 'self' and how she recalls it to have her own place in the confined boundaries of class and gender. It is a feminist film written by a man. The movie brilliantly traces the Phoenix identity of a woman who has the strength and courage to break away from the defined socio-cultural bounds and courageously re-emerges from her own ashes to shine out more impressively in her new 'self'.

“One is not born but rather becomes a woman”(Beauvoir 249).The above lines are landmark in the field of feminist movement, written by the famous feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex (Le Deuxieme Sexe* 1949). This book is a milestone in the evolution of the feminist theory. Woman has always been projected as secondary and inferior. The bias against woman can be seen right from the day of Creation. It is said that God has created man in His own image. The suggestion is that God is male. Further, it is said

that after creating man, God made woman from the rib of man. The first man on the earth Adam remarks about Eve:

This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man (OT Gen. 2:23).

The suggestion is that man was created first, and woman was created out of him. In other words, it is almost universally believed that woman is secondary to man. Perhaps such presentations of woman account for her secondary and subordinate position in society. Human identity can be recognized into two ways: Biological and Social. The New Oxford Intermediate Learner's dictionary defines the term identity as: 'recognize as being a specified person or 'thing' and 'whom' or what someone or something is' (Steel 339). In society man and woman are identified on different places. The first and foremost feature of identification is their physical structure through which he/she gets the sense of his/her being as male and female. When a child takes birth, its physical organ fixes its identity as a boy (he) or a girl (she). Lacan proposed "human identity or the ego is formed during the Mirror Stage, when an infant first encounters itself as a separate entity, typically through its reflection in a mirror. The infant joyfully identifies with its mirror image. However, this identification is based on an imaginary misrecognition because the mirror presents an *ideal* ego- perfect, complete, and in control- at odds with the infant's actual experience of its body, which is at this stage uncoordinated and helpless as well as speechless" (qtd in Chaudhuri 34).

The different social roles set the identity of individuals in the society where 'she' is defined as mother, daughter, sister, and wife and 'he' is defined as father, son, brother and husband. Besides their social roles their names and occupations also become the key factors of their identity through which he/she is recognized throughout their life. Social identity is an important aspect which makes man and woman perform their social roles according to rules which have been fixed for them. The condition of woman in society reflects that the words 'selfhood', 'existence' and 'identity' do not stand for woman. These concepts are made only for man. Woman has yet to meet these essential ethics of life. Being a human every gender must be aware of these ethics.

There are few Bollywood movies that have redefined the notions of 'selfhood' 'existence' and identity in relation to the role of woman in society. Generally a woman's identity is defined in terms of her relationships with man either as a daughter, sister, and wife or as a mother. She does not possess an individual identity of her own; an identity which sets

her apart from these socially assigned roles. That is what we read about woman and think her as belonging to man not to her. She is presented as an object that man uses for his purpose. She is depicted and written about as if she is nothing without the presence of man in her life. She lives as a victim and bearer of all the miseries who is bearing pain, weeping and seeking help from the so called stronger section of society. She is barely presented as a subject, as a creator of knowledge and as a torch bearer of liberty, emancipation and empowerment.

Cinematic stories, themes, and socio-cultural modes are interconnected, and find reflection in each other's space. Cinema affects society and the presentation of woman's issues deeply affects the mind of its viewer. Bollywood, since its inception, has not given much importance to woman's role except depicting her in a secondary position. Woman has not been given any active role which shows her ever beyond the stereotyped image. Her role in the movies has always been decided according to man's perception of herself. She has mostly been depicted as an object for love making and to provoke male audience's gaze. A voluptuous actress in any movie has always doubled its viewers. Just one sensuous item song of an actress can place the movie in blockbuster's list. It hardly matters to the audience if it fails to convey any valuable and concrete message. In lots of Hindi movies the female characters are not presented as a maker of meaning, breadwinner for the family and in good professional roles showing their potential and achieving success but are just there as a museum objects to be looked at.

With the acceleration of globalization, liberalization and growing popularity of feminist movement in our country the old conventional cinematic culture has changed and women's role has started taking new dimensions. The real journey of women's subjective presence in movies started in Hindi Cinema with Mehboob khan's cult movie *Mother India* (1942) with the theme of female chastity, pride, honour and strength which appears to be an extremely fascinating and engaging topic explored in the film. Another movie *Bandit Queen* (1994) proved to be a milestone on the arduous path. It broke all the defined boundaries challenging the accepted norms of behavioural codes associated with women's identity and existence at large and paved way towards realization and acceptance of the other side of her personality.

A woman who questions the system is seen as 'difficult'. It takes a lot of courage to break out of the tough and tight patriarchal norms. These clichés get reflected and reinforced through mainstream Bollywood cinema though on a slightly low pace. From 90s onwards some drastic changes were observed when being an actress became much more than just a

glorification of agonized image and objectification of physical beauty. Today with the completion of its 100 years Bollywood is ready to explore its new woman in more liberated, emancipated and broader perspective. Movies like: *Page 3*(2005), *Fashion*(2008), *Heroine, Kahani, Dirty Picture, Saheb Biwi or Gangster* (2012), *English-Vinglish* (2013), *Queen Mardaani, Marykom* (2014), *NH 10* (2015), *Dangal* (2016), *Naam Shabana, Begum Jaan and Mom*(2017) are some landmark movies which have changed the pace and face of contemporary Bollywood by shifting the female characters from the margins to the centre and boldly and brilliantly presenting their versatile dynamism and unbeatable creativity. The roles have depicted women as an independent, confident, courageous and competent individual having her own identity and space. She can do anything for which she has been bounded for long, ready to face the challenges and avail all possible opportunities. She is choosing the profession of her own choice, learning everything to emancipate herself, coming out from her domestic role and establishing her selfhood in society. These roles have shifted the stereotypical image of women into new one which is assertive, independent and empowered. The appearance of this 'new image of woman' in Bollywood is so effective that women are taking message from it and adopting the changes in their life.

The movie *Dor* powerfully sketches this new image of woman on the silver screen by intensely portraying the condition of women in our society and how they fight against the social system and recall the long suppressed selfhood. The term selfhood literally signifies the state of having a distinct identity and also individuality. Carl Gustav Jung has viewed selfhood in terms of psychological wholeness technically called individuation which stands for the evolution, organization, development and establishment of one's individuality. Jung states "I use the term individuation to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual', that is a separate indivisible unity or whole" (Jung, 1968)

*Dor* presents a vibrant shade of strong female bonding. It is a subversive tale of two women who make their own choices, challenging oppressive conditions and successfully battling patriarchies. Meera, a young fun loving girl very much in love with her husband Shankar, suffers at the hands of fate, ends up as a heartbroken widow. Her parents-in-law representing a traditional rural family blame her for their son's tragic death. Meera is forcefully hauled into the dark dungeons of widowhood. Her bangles are broken, jewellery is removed, and her colorful clothing suddenly turns into dull deep navy blue robes and she is reduced to an unloved, neglected and isolated household drudge. It is in these dark moments, that Meera retains her female bonds with a lively and affectionate young girl (whom Shankar

had found in a well, where she had been thrown away to die because she is a girl). Another woman who embraces Meera is the aged grandmother-in-law who was also widowed and who identifies with Meera's pain and yearning. She becomes her protector in the harsh and indifferent household. The third bond is Zeenat, a strong minded woman (from another corner of the country). She is a school teacher and stands up for her own rights, fighting society when needed. She married a young man (now in Saudi Arabia) against his family wishes but now takes up the financial responsibilities of her parents-in law in her husband's absence. Shankar (Meera's late husband) too was sent to Saudi Arabia in order to repay the family debts. Aamir and Shankar happened to share the same room.

Tragedy occurred when Shankar falls off from the balcony of their apartment and dies. Aamir was accused of murder and would be hanged. The only possibility of saving him arises from a clause in Saudi Arabian law saying that only the widow of the deceased can pardon an alleged murderer. It now becomes Zeenat's mission to find Shankar's widow and somehow persuade her to sign the relevant documents that would save Aamir. Zeenat takes an impossible journey from the mountains to the deserts of Rajasthan. As the two women come together, they become friends and learn to rediscover themselves and grow in each other's company. Zeenat casts herself into a heroic feminist frame urging Meera to take her life into her own hands. The hard experiences of personal rebellion have made Zeenat stronger and she helps transform Meera to come out of her present life of pure hell. The mutual respect, admiration and affection begin to reflect in their perception and their attitude. Meera learns to live her life anew while hardened Zeenat learns mellowness. The widowed Meera begins to rebel, goes to the market to eat sweets, visits the cinema hall, and goes for a camel ride. Away from prying eyes, Meera dances with all the vigor and spirit of youth and relives the once cherished moments (with her husband).

But finally, the ultimate moment comes and truth has to be disclosed. Meera is furious, feels betrayed by the woman she has grown so fond of. She very decisively refuses to sign the documents. Back in her home Meera is blamed for dishonouring the family by moving out and meeting Zeenat. Meera so far mute and docile speaks up "honour, which honour?" she then questions leasing of the ancestral house to a business man and worst of all the agreement to sell her to the same buyer. The infuriated patriarchs lock her in a dark room to be lost and forgotten. But at the dead of night, her grandmother-in-law comes as a ray of hope piercing the dark and desolate world of Meera and turns the key to open the doors of a brave new world. Meera says "I have ignored and suppressed my heart for so long that I no

longer hear that what it says,” but the old woman urges her to listen to her heart, that never goes silent and she must listen to it. Meera leaves immediately and runs bare foot over thorny sand to the railway station to hand over the documents to Zeenat that will save her husband’s life. The two women exchange smiles of love, understanding and unshakable bond of friendship. As the train moves, an outstretched hand invites the girl. Meera clasps Zeenat’s hand and climbs into the train to go into the wider unknown world but definitely a better and brighter world away from the shackles of undesired bondage to a self-assured haven.

The title of the movie *Dor*, has rich connotations. Firstly Dor means a thread, thread of emotion, companionship, mutual integrity and love which connects one woman to another woman. Dor represents the female bond. A woman can very well understand the feelings, emotions, sufferings and inner psyche of another woman as they both hold the same heart full of love, compassion and sentiments. In the movie Zeenat and Meera though opposite in nature from each other, one bold and another docile, share a true bonding of friendship, love and care with each other. They both are connected with the ‘dor’ of friendship. Secondly ‘dor’ emphasizes the power structure of society in which woman is owned by man. Her life’s dor (thread) is in the hands of men who play with it according to their desires and use woman for their selfish needs. The movie offers solution to this evil system by sending right message through the characters of Meera and Zeenat that now the time has come when woman will have to take the thread of her life in her own hands. She should not allow anyone to take the decision of her life. She should make herself capable enough to think for her life and be ready to face the consequences of her decisions. Meera who also gave the ‘dor’ of her life, first to her husband and then to her in laws, stands up against them and makes it clear to them that if they use her for their benefits, she will take her life back from them. This change in her personality presents a new image of woman to the whole world as well as in the world of her own.

The women character in the movie (Meera and Zeenat) befriend, encourage and motivate each other and set the new phenomenon of sisterhood in Bollywood which breaks the typed mould of presenting two women as opponent or rivals. Meera’s grandmother-in-law also supports her and advises her to listen the voice of her heart. Meera who was living in darkness after Shankar’s death finds a ray of hope from her grandmother-in-law’s love. A woman to woman relationship (Meera and Grandmother-in-law) reveals shades of love, care, concern, support and helps Meera to come out of the pains and sufferings of her life. She

feels there is someone who cares about her, who cares for her existence in this world. Meera's grandmother-in-law plays a pivotal role in changing her life.

When Meera gets confused that she wants to forgive Aamir but she is afraid that society would blame her on forgiving the murderer of her husband. She lays bare all her inner confusion to her grandmother-in-law. The lady suggests her to listen to her heart and be firm on her decision. After listening her, Meera finally makes up her mind. The fog of confusion clears up. Every perplexity in her mind just fades away when the old lady also supports her decision. In her grandmother-in-law's support she gets the answer to her question that what she is doing is not wrong. She is shown confident and courageous; smiles and gives hugs to her grandmother-in-law.

The notion of sisterhood by Natasha Walter says "the empowerment of women comes from a sense of solidarity and community between themselves" ("Modern Sisterhood"). These women give voice to each other's emotions, their combined endeavours inspire them to unearth their repressed feelings and achieve their desired place of freedom. The movie conveys a strong message to society that by mutual support women can transform their vision of selfhood into reality. The women in the movie constantly strive to break away from the clutches of patriarchal society and deeply feel the need to bring change in their position hence the desire for strength, achievement, competence, independence and equality. The female characters; Zeenat and Meera project a 'choice between "being a woman" and risking the pains of human growth' (Friedan 438). They choose the untrodden path and fight for their own personal growth and freedom. They never reduced their life to the "biological living" (438) of a woman which gives the wrong impression of being lulled to a comfortable environment. Rather they allowed and encouraged themselves to exploit their potential to the core as human beings and grow. Betty Friedan talks about "feminine fulfilment" (438) and writes that this is an irony that women consider this fulfilment as a prize of being a mother and wife and fulfil sexual needs. But after completing these roles also they do not feel complete. The real fulfilment is to attain selfhood, self-fulfilment- self-realization, autonomy, independence, individuality, self-actualization and realization to grow and realize the potentialities as a human being and enjoy the status of being a woman. Meera ultimately breaks the strings of widowhood and the taboos attached to it. She chooses for her the string of freedom to happiness. The women of the movie do feel fulfilled in recalling their self and create a new image of woman in Hindi cinema as well as in society and prove their worth as empowered, emancipated, and complete.



Dorproves to be a pacesetter for Bollywood women as it works as a catalyst in breaking the conformist moulds of society set for women and thereby powerfully attempts to project their multifaceted image where they are attaining selfhood and striving to establish their own identity and existence. Today female characters are performing as superstars in the movie which is a welcome change. The positive change in the attitude and approach of the male directors in dealing with female psyche and in constructing a positive and empowered image of women in the movies has drastically changed the perception of our society. This is a heartening change in itself that men are also ready to see women at a respectable place of freedom and equality. They are willingly accepting this new image of courageous woman who is living her life on her own terms, rejecting the odd rules and myths of society and gradually becoming a woman of her own self.

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