

## 'No' means 'NO': A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Image of 'Bad girls' in Chowdhary's Pink

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### Abstract

**Background:** The ongoing discourse about the agency and asserting the dignity of women's body is a prime concern for artists and activists. Their works raise tough questions about gender issues especially in metro cities. The selected movie *Pink* is a representative work that deals with sexual assault upon women, a burning issue under a socio-judicial discourse of our time.

**Objectives:** This study analyses a case of violence against women in the Bollywood movie *Pink* (2016) from the point of view of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). From social perspectives, the movie also reveals tendency of victim blaming, the prevailing social norms, especially in the Indian subcontinent, about the image making of so called 'good girls' or 'bad girls'.

**Methods:** The paper primarily used Siegfried Jäger's model of CDA as a conceptual framework of primary text analysis. However, the study also incorporated other theoretical outlooks as per the need and relevance of research objectives. For examples, the views of Susan Bordo, Simone de Beauvoir, Colette Guillaumin (especially the concept of appropriation) and Judith Butler (especially the concept of body performativity) etc. guided the discussion. Jäger's Dispositive Model of CDA offers a pragmatic approach to discuss the disparity between constructed knowledge and actions. It looks at social texts triangulating three aspects: discursive, non-discursive and materializations or manifestations of first two aspects.

**Results:** The analysis revealed some striking influences in the socio-judicial system of judging cases of VAW. In the illustration part, the interrelated strands of discussion have been clustered thematically as Strand 1: Dos and don'ts for girls, Strand 2: Sex appeals of girls, Strand 3: 'Good girls' in the eyes of a male chauvinist, Strand 4: Virginity matters for men, and Strand 5: 'No' means 'NO!' These five strands of discussion and their legal implications work as the key trope in bringing the case hearing to a logical conclusion. Taking account of the issues, the lawyer, who is advocating for the victims, brings his advocacy to a cogent conclusion.

**Conclusion:** The final verdict of the court addresses the filed complaints of gender violence against the girls. The perpetrator is found guilty for attacking and outraging a woman's dignity and agency of her body. However, the dispositive or settling aspect of discourse on gender violence is still on the process. Similarly, the discursive and non-discursive behaviors of both the perpetrator and the victims have not come to the surface. This provides ample of space of further inquiry and contestation in the research problem.

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis (CDA), good/bad girl image, male chauvinism, violence against women

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## Introduction

*Nice girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere!*

*So these girls went everywhere, including jail.....ha ha!*

This derogatory remark made by someone coded 'Divya Aggrawal1' from the Users Review Panel of the movie in YouTube drew my attention; and I regretted scrolling the section, especially after I had read a 4.5/5 starred review of the movie 'Pink'. The commentator sounded as though he was making fun of plight of the girls. Such sexist comment triggers anyone's concern about the end of gender violence in our societies. Though climax of the movie settles a case of gender violence, new male chauvinists come to surface again and again. This article investigates the deep rooted reasons of social problems like gender violence, the image-making of bad girls and ultimately subjugation of women's body via patriarchal system.

The 2016 Bollywood movie 'Pink', directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhary, and featuring key casts by Amitabh Bachchan, Tapassee Pannu and others deals with a socio-judicial discourse on a burning contemporary issue of sexual assault upon women. Any kind of sexual assault upon women who show no consent for physical relation is serious kind of VAW (Violence against Women) and act of crime from legal perspectives. Most of the countries have strict legal penalty system against sexual assault. From social perspectives, the movie also reveals the underlying social norms, especially in the Indian subcontinent, about the so called 'good girls' or 'bad girls' images. There are some prevailing norms or gender roles especially prescribed for girls. Contradictorily, such norms hardly exist for the boys of same age group. If the girls disobey or challenge these norms, they are labeled as 'bad girls' or 'anti-social'. In her acclaimed review published in *Times of India*, critic Meera Iyer says: "Pink is a powerful statement on the existing feudal mindset of a majority of India, where men and women are judged by a different yardstick (Iyer, 2016)". So, the reason behind choosing this visual text is to review and analyse this judgmental view of 'good and bad girls' image making. Good or bad tagging as such requires a fair critical understanding rather than stereotypical definitions. Further reviews of the literature on representation of women's body in social movies, gender politics and the director's art of storytelling on real life events establish the backdrop for our research problem.

## Review of Literature

This section briefly reviews the take and philosophy of some scholars with regards to gender issues and its representation in arts. For example, it incorporates selected literature on Aniruddha Roy Chowdhary's art of movie making and gender issues in Indian cinema; and also traces some relevant concepts of body representation as discussed by Susan Bordo, Simone de Beauvoir, Colette Guillaumin (especially the concept of appropriation) and Judith Butler (especially the concept of body performativity).

Aniruddha Roy Chowdhary is known for exploring the intricacies of human relationships in his movies. The National Award-winning Bengali films '*Anuranan*', '*Antaheen*' and his Bollywood debut '*Pink*' are his representative works. In an interview with Times of India reporter, Chowdhary equates filmmaking with the process of making babies and even higher state of complacency like attaining nirvana. While

expressing “I’m so engrossed with it that I don’t think much about the audience (Sharma G., 2017)”, he asserts that a true work of art doesn’t aim at pleasing the audience, rather it is the outcome of the movie maker’s passion and product of *art per se*.

Chowdhary raises tough questions about gender issues in Indian metro cities. Through its social message, it is touching the lives not only of women but also of men. He elucidates further on making of the movie: “The basic story was organically blended with the plot of a small incident suddenly blowing up into something big. Such things happen in people’s lives as well and it is embedded firmly in social realities such as moral policing that women face all the time in India (Duttagupta, 2016).” For him an art movie like ‘*Pink*’ is artistic representation of our day to day life events.

Susan Bordo focuses on how patriarchal understanding works on women’s body in terms of weight, physique and weakness. According to her, male dominated capital world manipulates women about what to wear and what to eat and how to behave (Bordo, 1995). Bordo’s views are inspired by Foucault’s concepts on power and subjugation of bodies. The discourse on women’s body and power incorporates ideas further from Simone de Beauvoir’s views on women’s body as second sex as seen from patriarchal perspectives, Colette Guillaumin’s concept of appropriation of women’s body and Judith Butler’s notion on gender performativity.

Guillaumin argues that there is nothing ‘obvious’ or ‘natural’ about our ideas of sex and race; and their historical evolution is one of the key concerns of her arguments. Race and sex are more than just symbolic phenomena. They are the hard facts of society: to be a man or woman, black or white are matters of social reality. To be a member of a particular race or sex brings with it different opportunities, rights and constraints. The study of semiotic systems must therefore be complemented by an examination of such material constraints, of how they operate and shape our life experience (Guillaumin, 1995).

Referring to Butler’s views on body performativity and patriarchal inscriptions on women’s body, Sara Salih advocates for the need of re-inscription and agency regarding women’s body: “Such re-inscriptions, or re-citations as Butler will call them in *Bodies That Matter*, constitute the subject’s agency within the law, in other words, the possibilities of subverting the law against itself. Agency is an important concept for Butler, since it signifies the opportunities for subverting the law against itself to radical, political ends (Salih, 2007).”

The research problem of our primary text revolves around the issues discussed above. The movie is all about establishing the agency and asserting the dignity of women’s body. It relates to Chowdhary’s question against male dictation on the criteria of how women should behave, wear, eat and drink.

In the words of Judith Butler, gender formation and inscription of roles and rules is not just a process, but it is a particular type of process, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame (Salih, 2007). The movie ‘*Pink*’ puts a big question mark on this regulatory frame. In fact, it upsets the frame of regulating women’s body in Indian Subcontinent.

## Materials and Methods

I have primarily used Siegfried Jager's model of CDA as conceptual framework of my primary text analysis. However, the study also incorporates other relevant theoretical outlooks as per the need and relevance of the research objectives. For instance, the views of Susan Bordo, Simone de Beauvoir, Colette Guillaumin (especially the concept of appropriation) and Judith Butler (especially the concept of body performativity) etc. substantiate the argument to some extent. Jager's Dispositive Model of CDA offers a pragmatic approach to discuss the disparity between constructed knowledge and actions. It looks at social texts triangulating three aspects: discursive, non-discursive and materializations or manifestations of first two aspects (Jager, 2002). What one utters or writes (discursive aspect) is based on one's knowledge (non-discursive aspect), and consequently the utterances result in manifestation or materialization of one's power exercise. For instance, licensing or restricting on what can be said about girls all depend on the power structures of societies according to Foucauldian paradigm (Foucault, 1978). According to Foucault, the power of censorship and repression of female body constructs the sexuality or image of women. This Victorian mindset is still present in the patriarchal societies of Indian subcontinent. So, this model is a constructive tool for analyzing the selected visual text which is based on behavioral and verbal gender violence.

The corpus of my study is based on a critical discourse analysis of each strand of the primary text. Firstly, I have briefly introduced my primary text, the movie '*Pink*', and stated my research problem from CDA point of view. Then, the structural analysis comprises of context, justification of the selected text, synopsis of the movie and discussion of the rhetorical schemas applied. The major arguments in the discussion substantiate the research question with regards to their rigor, implications and insinuations. The major discussion planes have been built as dialogic strands selected and clustered as discourse fragments and finally developed into thematic headings. Our discussions on the broad spectrums like social and legal implications of the discourse are discourse planes in Jager's terminologies. The analysis of each strand reflects on the communicative, social and legal implications of the verbal and non-verbal cues used in the entire movie. After passing detailed commentaries on each strand, the analysis concludes with an illustration of the entanglement or interrelation of the strands. The illustration at the end of discussion clarifies the architecture of the overall analysis.

The movie *Pink* (especially the climactic case hearing scene) unfolds how the male chauvinists (represented by Rajveer and his gang) are judgmental upon the moral characters of young girls and how this tendency leads to negative image making as 'bad girls' and ends in cases of gender violence.

Three independently living city girls (Minal, Falak and Andrea) join a few boys at a Rock party. They come closer, drink together but the girls refuse to sleep with the boys against their plan. The boys would not give up their plan (and of course their compelling lust); so they allure the girls to the hotel rooms. The boldest among the girls, Minal Mehta, defends herself by attacking Rajveer Singh, who tries to molest her. She smashes his head with a bottle causing him a severe head injury. Minal's act for self-defense turns out to be a case of 'attempt of murder' after Rajveer files an FIR against her to exercise his ego and power (as he is the son of the state minister), whereas Minal's complaint against the molestation is not

even registered at the police station. Maddened by vengeance and male ego, the boys abduct and molest Minal again to intimidate her. Minal is arrested and the girls feel really helpless as they fail to rescue Minal. Minal's confidence is broken due to these dirty plays of Rajveer and indifference of the police department. In the meantime, a veteran (but retired) lawyer Deepak Sehgal, who being the neighbor, has been observing the activities of the girls, becomes ready to advocate for Minal. The climax of the movie is all about the case hearing and strong argumentation of the lawyer on the prevailing discourse of power and gender stereotypes.

### Results and Discussion

There are at least two clear discourse fragments in the movie that basically come from the patriarchal mindset of traditional societies in the Indian subcontinent. At surface level, the movie looks like a complicated case on sexual assault having a number of legal repercussions. Considering the underlying attitudes of the characters, we also come to uncover a social plane of the discourse. Putting in Jager's terms, the movie encompasses all three discursive, non-discursive and materialized aspects of gender violence.

All the discourse strands discussed below have been clustered thematically. The discussion or analysis of each strand draws examples and references from our social, cultural and legal outlooks. Basically, the analysis revolves around the core arguments of the lawyer in the climactic case hearing scene of the movie.

#### *Strand 1: Dos and don'ts for girls*

At the court, Deepak Sehgal, sarcastically proposes some ground rules for the safety of girls which come as a mockery and challenge to the existing norms about what is safe or unsafe for girls: i. Independent working girls, who work till late night, staying away from their family, have suspicious characters. Thus, they are likely to be the victim of sexual assaults. ii. Young boys are not safe friends of young girls as long as they are in drunken state, staying in hotel rooms, attending sensuous parties or being in situations of physical proximity. iii. Girls' act of drinking with boys is taken as a gesture of sex invitation; especially when girls make their own pegs, have multiple pegs or crack jokes.

In the movie or even in similar real life situation, if girls behave in these ways, the society is likely to call them bad girls. In the movie, the three girls represent the free spirit of city girls. Like boys, they don't want to be confined by the dos and don'ts set by the patriarchal society. All the stated ground rules are premise for the enthymematic conclusions implied respectively: i. Good girls should not work and stay independently from males. ii. Good girls should not accompany the boys in booze parties and hotel rooms. iii. Good girls should not drink together with boys, not freakishly at least. iv. Otherwise, they are called bad girls.

These conclusions are tell-tale evidences of male chauvinism prevailing in traditional societies of Indian subcontinent and subordination of young women by patriarchal system. Women are good or bad through the lens of men only. All the tagging, stereotyping and physical assaults result from the male chauvinism and their psychology of treating women as commodities.

***Strand 2: Sex appeals of girls***

For men like Rajveer, girls who invite boys through sensuous gestures are bad girls. Besides, if girls behave freely like boys, they are perceived as bad girls. For explaining these enthymematic conclusions, we can quote following premises as expressed by Rajveer. On the question put forth by the lawyer, “Was he sexually aroused or invited by Minal?” Rajveer claims that Minal was appealing him for sex in certain ways: i. She was laughing amorously and touching his body. ii. She was wearing tight jeans. iii. She was drinking with boys. iv. She was staying late night. v. She was a tattooed girl. Vi. She was staying independently away from her family.

Most of the perceptions of Rajveer are related to social or attitudinal issues, basically stereotyped image making and judgement about female sex appeal. Practically, these are not sole factors for sexual arousal. It is just a case of male gaze with sexual desire here. At least, the evidences are not directly correlated with sex stimulating hormone testosterone in males’ bodies.

The problem of possessive male gaze upon females relates to the ideas of Susan Bordo. Bordo asserts that patriarchal understanding works on women’s body in terms of weight, physique and weakness. According to her, male dominated capital world manipulates women about what to wear and what to eat and how to behave (Bordo, 1995). At surface level, all the allegations and counter allegations in the case hearing are the discursive (verbal output), non-discursive repository in the characters (their knowledge and attitudes towards good girls or bad girls), whereas the moment boys perpetrate sexual assault upon the girls comes as the manifestation of their patriarchal mindset.

***Strand 3: ‘Good/Bad girls’ in the eyes of a male chauvinist***

The definition of a good or bad girl from a male chauvinist point of view is another string of the debate on good and bad image making. Rajveer feels being challenged by the lawyer as ‘a bad boy indulging with a bad girl (as he alleges Minal)’ as though his allegations turn out to be a boomerang hit against himself. He even fears that his proposed engagement with a ‘good girl’ from a reputed family would be broken. Once again, he demoralizes Minal saying: “*Achhi gharki auratein sarab nahi piti !* (Women from good families don’t drink!)” He is biased so much that drinking women are equal to prostitutes for him. Not only Minal, her room partners who were together with Minal as confidants when the event took place, are also questionable for a male chauvinist like Rajveer. Falak Ali’s living-together relationship with a divorcee named Javed Ali would be unusual and unacceptable for most of the men from a traditional society. The prosecutor even blames Falak for having relationship with the divorcee just because she is paid for that. Moreover, the CC TV footage shows that the other friend of Minal, Andrea entering the room of one of the boys in the group and after a while the light is off. Was she tricked or was she willing to enter the boy’s room in order to sleep with him? Patriarchal judgement once again would go for the second possibility. After all, she too is a friend of the alleged bad girl Minal.

***Strand 4: Virginity matters for men***

Virginity is not a scientific term (as there is no accurate way and result of so called virginity testing). It is a social construct. Considering its detrimental aspects, there are calls from various organizations (For example, UN agencies like UN Human Rights, UN Women and the World Health Organization) to end virginity testing, a medically unnecessary, painful, humiliating, and traumatic practice enforced by

irrational social and legal institutions that serve male interest. Maryam Mansoor unfolds this facet of patriarchal societies:

Virginity is a patriarchal social construct created to control women's sexualities. It doesn't even actually exist! There is no medical or biological definition of virginity. It was a concept defined primarily to control female sexuality to ensure paternity with the advent of private property and the patrilineal system (Mansoor, 2017).

Virginity testing happens for several reasons, including requests from parents or potential partners to establish marriage eligibility or from employers for employment eligibility. Investigation departments impose the victims of rape for the tests to make sure whether or not rape really 'occurred'. These not only violate women's and girls' rights, but in cases of rape can cause additional pain and mimic the original act of sexual violence. This leads to anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress. When women or girls feel their ego, and honour getting hurt at extreme level, they even make attempt of committing suicide. So, the norms of so called virginity are inhuman especially to girls and women. The movie Pink raises an important question on virginity: How fair is it to equate ones hypothetical virginity conditions with ones purity and moral character? Such correlation results in faulty conclusions like the one who has lost virginity (even if we take it for granted) is a person of immoral character.

To substantiate this argument, let's review the probing session between the lawyer and the alleged girl Minal who is charged for physical attack with attempt of murder:

Lawyer: Are you a virgin?

Minal: No.

Lawyer: When did you lose your virginity?

Minal: At 19

Lawyer: Who was the boy?

Minal: My boyfriend Anish.

Lawyer: Did he pay for it?

Minal: Why would he pay? I liked him; we liked each other.

Lawyer: Did you have other physical relationships besides this one?

Minal: Sometimes.

(Source: Case hearing scene, movie 'Pink')

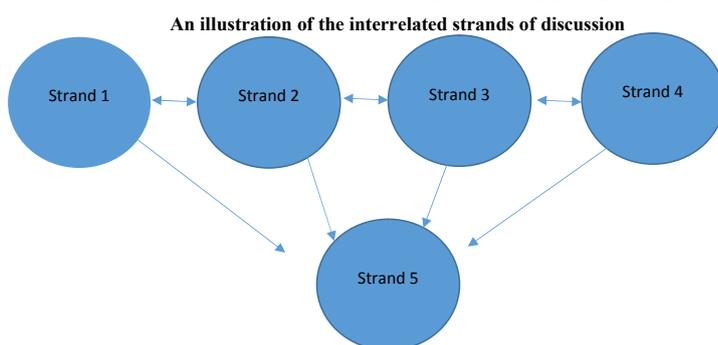
Does it mean Minal is a girl with questionable character because of her pre marriage physical relationships? The ending of the movie discloses that she is not because she is serious about her 'consent' when it comes to physical relationship as such. In case of Rajveer Singh, it was strict 'NO' from her side, irrespective of whether she had had a couple of pegs or she was dancing at a sensuous Rock party or as claimed by Rajveer, she was provided with money. So this line between 'yes' and 'no' is the most vulnerable line that makes all the difference in the tagging of 'good' or 'bad' moral character. In the words of Mansoor once again: "The yardstick for measuring whether a woman is good or bad has always been associated with her virginity. According to societal standards, "good women" are those who abstain from sex until their marriage whereas anyone who deviates from this standard is a "bad woman". A woman's morality

is questioned based on the status of her virginity (2017)". Thus, the prevailing notion of virginity as a determinant condition for the moral character of young (especially of marriageable age) girls itself is questionable because such criterion hardly applies in case of boys. Besides, morality is a culture and context bound concept.

### **Strand 5: 'No' means 'NO!'**

This is the final but most logical evidence for Deepak Sehgal's defense of the case. Even if all the charges against Minal Mehta are proved, this loud and clear 'NO' matters for law with regards to consent for physical relationship. One's right to self- body is a basic human right given to all, irrespective of gender, caste, class, race or whatsoever. The lawyer argues on the same ground: "'No' is not just a word. It is a self-evident truth in itself. My client said 'No' means 'No'! 'No' always means 'No' whoever speaks it." (Final case hearing scene)

'No' literally means 'NO'. Connotatively also, 'No' means 'NO' (may be with some reservations or afterthoughts) on the ground of basic human right of refusal for what one considers is not right. In case of girls' 'No' as a reply to men's interest or proposal for physical relationships, men tend to undermine and sometimes totally overlook this 'No'. As a result, imposed sexual relations or rape cases are common day to day events. The lawyer makes it a point that in our part of the world, where watch or time decides the characters of the girls, we should save our boys not girls. Because, if we save the boys from wrong doings, girls will be safe themselves. Whether a woman is a sex-worker (as charged by Rajveer), a free individual, a wife or a slave, if she says 'no' to being touched, then no man has the right to force himself on her or outrage her modesty. On this basis, Rajveer is found guilty for outraging a woman's modesty and dignity. Thus, if we analyze the whole arguments and counter arguments in the entire case hearing scenes, we find it quite engaging and thought provoking case not only for the judge, even for the audience and enthusiasts of law. Behind such engagement, there is a powerful logical structure functioning at various levels. Illustrated below is an attempt of mapping the possible strands of arguments:



### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The absolute 'NO' in the last strand is the major ground to justify the innocence of the girls. Young city girls, out of natural human behavior, coming closer to the boys or even drinking with them, doesn't necessarily mean they have loose characters. The movie beautifully makes a tapestry of all the interconnected issues related to individualism, self-respect, freedom, honesty and safety of girls against the back drop of male chauvinism. The final case hearing scene of the movie brings all these strands together and supports the cogency of our research problem.

The verdict of the court declares Rajveer guilty for demoralizing and attacking a woman's dignity and right of consent for physical relationship. It proves that the lawyer's argumentation is cogent enough to bring justice for the girls, especially Minal. This case attracts the legal provision stated in Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 in relation to acts of sexual violence:

*Section 354. Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty*—Whoever assaults or uses criminal force to any woman, intending to outrage or knowing it to be likely that he will there by outrage her modesty, 1 [shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than one year but which may extend to five years, and shall also be liable to fine. (IPC Website, p. 79)

Besides this is a case to sexual harassment too. Sexual harassment is defined under Section 354 A of IPC (*Sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment*) as “a man committing any of the following acts— (i) physical contact and advances involving unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures; or (ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; or (iii) showing pornography against the will of a woman; or (iv) making sexually coloured remarks, shall be guilty of the offence of sexual harassment (IPC website, p.79).”

Though, sexual harassment is irrespective of gender in present context, in patriarchal societies, mostly men perpetrate it upon women. This is a different part of the debate that demands thoughtful discussion. In the climactic case hearing scene, the lawyer claims that Rajveer and his gang perpetrated at least three of these acts. So they need to be penalized. The verdict of the court also reflects this judicial spirit of IPC and logical advocacy of the lawyer. At the core, the verdict honors the dignity of all independent women. After all, essence of a woman's modesty is her sex, i.e. a woman possesses modesty by virtue of being a woman. A woman's body is her identity.

Relating the concept of ‘a woman's body’ with the ideas of Judith Butler, Minal's self-defensive action is an example of ‘body performativity’ against the prescribed gender roles for females and subversion of the patriarchal values (Butler, J. 1999, p.163). Minal is just trying to erase the tag of ‘bad girl’ inscribed on her body. If we apply the dispositive triangle of Jager, the crux of the problem is what the perpetrators (basically Rajveer) think or speak of the female characters on the basis of their situated identities. Definitely, from cultural modal point of view, their stigmas and derogatory language used for the girls is not acceptable for any civilized person who believes in gender equality. From cultural context, this is an acute example of male chauvinism. The avid lawyer Deepak follows the clues in these discursive and non-discursive behaviors of both the defending and victim parties and becomes able to bring his advocacy to a logical conclusion. However, the final verdict of the case in the movie is yet to be implemented practically in real life situation. In Jager's terms, the dispositive aspect of this discourse is on the process. There are a number of male chauvinists like Rajveer around us. The way they look down young, fashionable and independent girls as sexual commodities, reflects discursive and non-discursive practices of patriarchy. The movie is just one materialized representation on the screen. There are many untold and overlooked real life stories like this. At least, both discursive and non-discursive part of the debate on ‘good girls’ or ‘bad girls’ image making has manifested on the surface through this movie.

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- The Indian Penal Code. "Arrangement of sections/ Section 354, 354A" <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A1860-45.pdf>