

*Gully Boy (2019)*

Name:

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Indian and Global Desires in *Gully Boy* (2019)**Film Synopsis**

*Gully Boy* (2019) is a Bollywood movie directed by Zoya Akhtar. It is a coming-of-age film that features a ghetto-born young man fighting his way out of the poverty that he was born in. The setting of the film is the Dharavi Slums in Mumbai. The protagonist, Murad Ahmed (played by Ranveer Singh) is in his final year in college. His father marries a second wife who is Murad's age mate. This marriage brings discord to Murad's family and threatens the breakup between his mother and father. Meanwhile, Murad is pursuing a career in music much to the disapproval of his father. His father has invested money in his education and desired to see him take a more "professional" career in the future. Murad's girlfriend comes from a similarly poor family but she is training to become a surgeon. She is jealous of Murad's artistic female friend who she sees as a threat to her relationship with his longtime boyfriend. Through the characters of Murad, his father, his girlfriend, and the two families, the viewer learns that human desires are similar across the globe. In some cases, the desires of one person conflict with those of another. As youth, Murad and his girlfriend desire to live successful lives as compared to that of their parents.

**Murad's Desires**

Ahmed Murad, who goes by the artistic name Gully Boy, is a college final year student who nurtures the dream of becoming a rapper. While his desires remain his greatest source of motivation, he wants the best for his family. When his father gets injured, he takes a job as a cab driver to support his family. In the workplace, he notes the deep-rooted social inequalities that exist in the slum communities. Through the mentorship of his college music idol, Murad begins

writing lyrics that he practices in the streets. Although he faces criticism and adverse reaction from his musical belligerent, Murad is committed to seeing his dream come true. Through his music, the viewer learns of his desire to use hip-hop music to address various challenges that people face in life. Murad does not let his background or the resistance from his contemporaries kill his dream of pursuing hip hop music career. The hit song in the film, “*Apna Time Aayega*” speaks about the ambition of this young man. The song title translates to “my time will come,” illustrating Murad’s strong belief in future success.

In India, like other parts of the world whether hip-hop music is common, youth relate with this genre to gain self-esteem and cultivate a sense of belonging to a certain community. This is especially true for youth that comes from underprivileged settings (Dattatreyan & Singh, 2016). Hip-hop music is common in the American urban culture. Due to globalization, this culture has penetrated other parts of the world. In the African urban youth population, for example, hip hop and rap music have become a means of expressing social injustice and other problems in slum settings (Myllyla, 2009). Hip-hop culture is used as a tool for political activism in Kenya and Nigeria (O’Brien et al., 2013). *Gully Boy (2019)*, therefore, expresses the desires of an urban young man whose life has been marked with hardship. It expresses a desire for change. Murad directs his lyrics to rebuking social inequalities. In other words, the protagonist uses music to show his desire for change, the economic empowerment of the poor people, and the emancipation of the youth from evils like crime and drug abuse.

In the film, it is clear that Murad is not contented with his economic status. His parents are aware that education will help Murad lead a better life. However, Murad is conversant with the state of unemployment in India among people with college diplomas. In 2019, Aljazeera run an article on the status of graduate unemployment in India. According to the article, youth with

college education were twice as unemployed as those without one (Sanghera, 2019). Murad is aware of the situation of graduate unemployment in his county. He understands that a college diploma may not do much towards his financial success. Music, according to Rutter (2016) is a rewarding industry that earns millions of dollars for artists, performers, videographers, and producers. Murad wants to venture into this industry as an alternative source of income to the profession that his father plans for him.

### **Desires of Murad's Father**

Murad's father represents the many Indian parents that look towards the success of their children. Although the role of fathers in an Indian family has changed over the years, Sriram (2012) maintains that fathers are critical in promoting the success of their children. According to various reports, "fathers think it is their 'duty' to create a conducive environment for the child's growth, address their child's health needs, support both present but future security of the child, and maintain healthy loving and close relationships with children" (Sriram, 2012). In securing a future for the children, fathers feel obliged to fund their children's education. Besides paying for the education, Indian fathers encourage their children to perform well in school. In India, a father has a role in cultivating good habits in children. They are also responsible for protecting their children from developing bad habits (Sriram, 2012).

Although Murad's father fulfills most of the duties identified by Sriram (2012), he does not appear to protect his son from emotional turmoil. Throughout the film, Murad is mentally disturbed given the social issues surrounding his life. His father sets a bad example in marrying a second wife and perpetrating domestic violence against his mother. In some cases, his father physically abuses his mother in front of him, prompting Murad to mount a defense against his father. Here, Murad's father inculcates negative habits in his son, but the latter abhors his

father's mannerisms. Marrying a second wife portrays Murad's father's desire for recognition.

Swaraj (2019) cites that polygamy in Indian society creates a social reputation for a man.

Murad's father feels that marrying a younger wife will demonstrate his manliness to his wife and the larger community.

### **Safeena's Desires**

Safeena Firdausi is a brave and outspoken young woman who is Murad's girlfriend in the film. Safeena's boldness is evident in her actions and words. This boldness also demonstrates his desires as a woman born and raised in a slum Indian community. When her mother asks her whether she can cook, Safeena declines and promises to become a surgeon one day and transplant her liver. Therefore, Safeena desires to pursue her own path and overcome glass ceilings in her patriarchal society. In caste-system India, education was a reserve of the men. According to Kumar (2010), education gave men "the knowledge and communication skills required to participate in the widening scope for employment in the State apparatus and upward mobility through it, and also enabled them to reconstruct and reinforce patriarchal beliefs by extending their power over the emerging sphere of popular politics." However, the 20th Century Indian political and social system has included more women in school in an effort to create gender equality (Kumar, 2010).

Gender roles in India are similar to those of other patriarchal societies in the world. In India, a woman has to get married at some point in her early adulthood and live under the care and provision of her husband (Kumar, 2010). In the economic sphere, women do work that is rarely rewarding in terms of income. In the fishing community of Kerala, Gopal, Leela, and Meenakumari (2014) cite that women's roles in this economic activity were limited to "post-harvest activities, including sorting, marketing and processing the catch." This means that

women did not have access to more productive and meaningful sources of revenue, in this case, the fisheries. Concerning marriage, Kumar (2010) cites that parents dictated when a girl should marry, and her mother is responsible for inculcating values that would make her a suitable wife at home. Safeena's mother is seen in the film challenging her daughter about her culinary skills, but Safeena desires to be an economically empowered woman rather than being a homemaker.

### **Case against Desires**

While desires are important in nurturing dreams, they can have negative consequences for an individual and society. In Hindu tradition, "desires are the root cause of emotional upheavals" (Ramaprasad, 2013). Desires are seen to emanate from ego or *ahamkara*, and they can be a sign of imperfection or incompleteness (Ramaprasad, 2013). An unfulfilled desire can provoke "anger (*Krodha*), jealousy (*Asuya*), unhappiness (*Dukha*), and suffering" (Ramaprasad, 2013). In the movie, various people have unfulfilled desires. Safeena's desire for love and the ensuing competition from Sky leads to an outburst of anger that results in a fight between the two. Murad's desire to pursue his own path of life creates acrimony between him and his father. The breakup that results after Murad's father marries a second wife is evident that desires can have far-reaching implications for the individual and family.

### **Conclusion**

*Gully Boy (2019)* expresses the desires for success, social reputation, and changing the status quo among various characters. The film's protagonist, Murad Ahmed, is a slum-born young man with dreams of becoming a renowned hip-hop musician. His father marries a second wife and plunges his family into chaos. With the ensuing violence at home, social inequality, and economic hardships in the slum, Murad decides to venture into music with an aim to elevate his

financial status and advocate for progressive changes. Murad's girlfriend desires to become a surgeon and prove her abilities to her parents. The desires of the various actors in the film are consistent with those of different people across the world. In the Indian context, desires are important for achieving one's dreams. However, they are detrimental to emotional health and can evoke anger, sadness, and suffering.

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