

Questions from Eastern Eye newspaper:

1. Where in India are you based?

NOT RELEVANT

2. The Square Circle in many ways appears to be way ahead of its time. How relevant are the issues conveyed in The Square Circle now? Did you ever think The Square Circle's focus on gender, identity and equality in India would still be the hot topic nearly 20 years later? (I imagine this is a good time to bring out a DVD of the film?)

Looking back, it does seem to be 'way ahead of its time'! The issues pertaining to sexuality and identity occupy the contemporary sensibilities in a major way, hence are extremely relevant even 20 years later.

Issues relating to sexuality are social taboos which remain unspoken, untouched upon. A cumulative social silence leads to irrational fears born out of ignorance; individual awkwardness transforms into collective prejudices & biases. Transvestism is one such abandoned theme that we prefer to keep closeted. We consider transvestism as unnatural deviation from what is "normal". Transvestites are often equated with eunuchs which are subjects of social ridicule/hatred/ostracism, all of which often instigate intolerance and violence. The male chauvinist culture and patriarchal dominance lead to their subjugation. Refusal to accept transvestites is the standard practice across cultures. Thus The Square Circle is relevant not only in India but all over the world.

The main inspiration behind my exploration of this theme was the question - why do we react so vehemently towards something which is not in conformity with that of the majority? Is it because 'their' choices are different from 'ours'; is it a war between majority and minority – a sheer game of numbers? Or does it threaten the core of human existence? I also feel that The Square Circle not only explores the questions of transvestism but also examines the man-woman relationship. I made the film with a sincere hope that we will respect the rich diversity of identities and alternative ways of being, rather than unleashing ostracism & condemnation; that we will not just tolerate, but accept differences; that we will offer empathy and not just pity or mercy!

3. Why have you in many of your films, chosen to focus on social issue and the portrayal of women? Has growing up with three sisters and having two daughters yourself had anything to do with this?

People marginalized by our society who keep on fighting the proliferated antagonism inspire me. 'Women' are the species which have been relentlessly pursuing to resist the patriarchal aggression. Their struggle comes alive through the characters in my films. What fascinates me is their irreverence towards

mainstream and the strength to own up their choices till the end. Through subversion of cumulative silence and prototypes of exploitation, my protagonists march towards love and empathy. Therefore, I have chosen to depict simple but autonomous, unconventional female characters who seek to challenge providence. My characters strive to break their alienation and assert against the mainstream dominance.

4. Did you watch Leslee Udwin's documentary India's Daughter? What were your thoughts on it?

Yes, I did. Even though its artistic quality may be debated upon, it was not offensive at all. It did not have any shock value for me since the masculine culture across borders of nations is mostly wretched and disgusting. Though I do not feel the need to explore the mindset of the rapist, I can understand the director's pursuit. (One may also ask why did she interrogate only one rapist whose defence was that he did not rape but merely drove around the bus. If the director's motive was 'to explore the rapist's mindset', the purpose was not achieved by excluding the others.) Having said this, it seemed to have an implicit position that the depiction mirrored psyche of 'Indian men'! This was not palatable to me. Probably because of this implication, most Indians felt offended. Being an Indian exposed to the contingencies of the world, I feel that this can be placed anywhere – developed or developing or under developed countries.

5. What was your reaction to India banning the film from being shown?

No Indian believing in freedom of speech supported the governmental decision to ban the broadcast of the film. I have always waged a war against censorship of any kind. In case of The Square Circle, I had accepted the 'For Adults Only' certificate, however refused to accept any visual/audio cuts in the film. Even though Indian culture may seem 'conservative' in the non-liberal sense, it is not. Adherence to traditional values is significant though!

6. You've done a lot of films to highlight the issue of identity and gender stereotypes. Do film makers have a responsibility to tackle the status quo? and does it need to be more than just showing rape scenes in their films? **AND**

7. After the Delhi gang rape in 2012 Bollywood was blamed by some for its suggestive song and dance numbers...what responsibility do film-makers have to bore when they make films?

I guess my stand is made very clear in my answer to the question # 3.

8. Should Bollywood try to show transvestites in more serious roles?...(currently they are laughed at in comedy roles. Nirmal Pandey showed how versatile the role can be. Especially near the end of the film where he falls in love with Sonali Kulkarni)

My answer to the question # 2 makes my stand on this clear.

9. What plans do you have the future? Any more films/projects?

After The Square Circle I have made about 9 films in 3 different languages including Paheli (The Riddle) which was India's official entry to the 78th Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Film category. Presently I have gone back to painting which was my first love before entering the world of theatre and films as an actor/director.