

**AKS  
INTERNATIONAL  
MINORITIES FESTIVAL  
PAKISTAN EDITION  
FILM  
ART  
DIALOGUE  
JAN 1<sup>ST</sup> - FEB 15<sup>TH</sup> 2023  
LAHORE  
KARACHI  
MULTAN**

**+  
NATIONWIDE AKS OUTREACH**



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**AKSFESTIVAL.COM**

# AKS INTERNATIONAL MINORITIES FESTIVAL PAKISTAN' 2023

## ART - FILM - DIALOGUE

Aks International Minorities Festival will be hosting the 7th Pakistani edition from Jan 1st - Feb 15th, 2023 in Lahore, Karachi, Multan and Faisalabad.

Once again the festival is geared up with a powerful programme to raise focus on minorities' issues and celebrate visibility of minorities and subcultures in Pakistan. The Aks festival is determined to bring films, art and dialogues that are usually never included or shown into the mainstream media platforms. Our wide range of films are diverse in subject matters, origins and style of filmmaking and each film programme accompanies with a dialogue and/or performing art event. Committed to our goal to be the most widespread and free of cost film and art festival in Pakistan, we look forward to creating safe spaces for peaceful and fruitful dialogues on the current relevant topics. We also offer Aks OutReach programme that consists of short films made by/in Pakistan, these films will serve educational and awareness purposes and will be shown in universities, colleges, art spaces and even in private spaces across Pakistan. We are extremely honored and thankful to have all our strong partners on board with us in Pakistan.

# SUBRANG SOCIETY

Aks International Minorities Festival is a great platform to know about the superhumans living on this earth. To see their stories, strengths, and sufferings and cheer for them. Subrang Society has been holding the Aks festival since 2016 in Karachi and each year we have represented films and art work related to sexual and gender diversity groups. Our society thinks these people are in the minority but the Aks festival shows how talented and extraordinary people with minority backgrounds are. The Aks festival portrays the face of the community that every person should see so they know who these people really are.

For more updates please visit  
[WWW.AKSFESTIVAL.COM](http://WWW.AKSFESTIVAL.COM)

# AKS HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS

The Aks festival is proud to present Aks Human Rights Awards to these magical and groundbreaking personalities for their magnificent body of work.

## ALINA KHAN

**Actress / Dancer (JoyLand, Darling and Happy Marriage)**

Alina and director Siam surprised us all with their acclaimed short film “Darlings” last year. Later when Saim revealed that Alina was not the first choice for the film I could not believe it, but having watched the director-actor duo creating magic again with JoyLand this year it’s safe to say that no one other than Alina could have done justice to Biba. The life Alina breathes into the tragic reality of Biba is with such swag that we all celebrate it today globally.

Further talking to Alina she spoke about how Trans murders are a reality, an alarming reality of our society that no one talks about that too in the mainstream media. She shared how Biba is so different yet similar to Alina in so many ways.

Apart from her phenomenal dancing and bold choices she deserves praise for her acting skills.

Aks Pakistan is proud to present her with Aks Human Rights Award 2023.

## FASEEH BARI KHAN

**Playwright, Director and Producer (Kabar Khana, Qudussi Saheb ki Bewa, Gulzar )**

Faseeh has been a household name in the Pakistani entertainment Industry for many years now. He has worked as creative head for different mainstream TV channels and has directed and written multiple plays, films, and dramas for the Pakistani TV industry. His work in so many ways has been termed revolutionary, ‘ahead of its time’, and even controversial at times. The heaps of praise from around the world came with its own set of challenges when his work started getting censored and he was forced by makers to write something “Normal”. Talking to him revealed how he hates the idea of self-censorship and believes in writing about what comes from the heart instead of making a set of rules before writing. He told us how some of his work was outright banned because he refused to censor it. Faseeh further explained how he believes that content should only be certified for a certain audience instead of being censored. Finally to save his work from getting under the knife, Faseeh finally joined OTT through “Kabar Khana ” on Youtube.

Faseeh launched his Youtube channel and named it “Kabar Khana” roughly translated to “House of Crap”. Kabar Khan since its launch has gained almost 20 thousand permanent subscribers with multiple mini-series successfully running and winning hearts globally. Faseeh should get all the praise for not only providing the audience with censor free content but also for creating a content eco-system locally. Creating a space where new ideas are accepted and experiments are done which paves way for Magic.



## JOYLAND

Dir: Saim Sadiq, Duration: 126 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Punjabi, Urdu and English with English subtitles

### Special pre-festival screening Karachi Only

Mumtaz, a strong-willed makeup artist, passionate about her work, lives with her quiet, unemployed husband, Haider, in an extended joint family with her father-in-law. When Haider finds work as a backup dancer for the charismatic transgender musician, Biba, he discovers another way to love and live. Mumtaz, forced to be a housewife, is suffocated with patriarchal demands. From Mumtaz with her resolute ego and Biba who is true to her desires, to Haider's dynamic with his father with his domineering ways, the film paints a delicate picture of shifting expectations of gender and sexuality in a religious and patriarchal society.



## MOOSA LANE

Dir: Anita Hopland, Duration: 81 min, Country: Pakistan, Denmark, Norway, Language: Kutchi, Urdu and English, with English subtitles

Moosa Lane is the name of the street in Karachi where this Danish-Pakistani director, Anita Hopland's family lives. From the personal video archives shot over a period of 14 years in her two home countries to understand her origins and herself. The cultural contrasts between the house in Karachi, where 25 family members live under one roof, and the everyday reality of Copenhagen in a Danish welfare state are stark. But in her reflective meditation on mental and geographical distances, and on what binds us together despite our differences, she builds a bridge across time and place. In Pakistan, her cousin's daughter Saima becomes an anchor and focal point until the day she is to be married off. Time passes, the two families change, and so does Hopland herself. 'Moosa Lane' is a personal family story in a wide format, where all emotions are allowed to color the canvas along the way



## A GIRL FROM MOGADISHU

Dir: Mary McGuckian, Duration: 112 min, Country: Somalia, Ireland and Belgium, Language: Somali and English with English subtitles

This inspiring drama of female empowerment is based on the testimony of Ifrah Ahmed, Female Genital Mutilation activist. Fleeing a forced marriage in war-torn Somalia in 2006, Ifrah is trafficked to Ireland where a medical examination when seeking asylum

reveals the extent of her injuries as a child. Traumatized by the memory, she channels the experience into a force for change. With support from her friend Amala, and Irish politicians Emer and Joe Costello, and against opposition from community leaders, religious men and members of her own family, she emerges as a formidable campaigner against FGM at the highest political levels.



## THIS IS NOT ME

Dir: Saeed Gholipour, Duration: 71 min, Country: Iran, Language: Farsi with English subtitles

A moving portrait of two young trans men embarking upon the difficult legal process of gender transition in Iran "This Is Not Me" offers a glimpse of what life is like for trans youth in Iran. Despite loving and supportive parents, Shervin and Samar are forced to live covert lives, hide from neighbors, and even consider emigration. A detailed depiction of the legal and social labyrinth promising a slight taste of freedom.

Gholipour's documentary is a form of personal testimony, giving voice and visibility to the individuals fighting for their rights. A significant film made all the more poignant for its unique and untold story of trans men in Iran



## NAANU LADIES

Dir: Shailaja Padindala, Duration: 150 min, Country: India, Language: Kannada with English subtitles

Naanu Ladies tells us the story of two women, Anita and Padma, the former who aspires to become an actor and the latter who is a painter. Things around them start getting complicated as they fall in love with each other and start protesting against the dislike and opposition by the society and their families. Will they be able to successfully navigate their way around the problems and save their blossoming romance



## HOME SWEET HOME

Dir: Humad Nisar, Duration: 42 min, Country: Pakistan and Germany, Language: English and Urdu with English subtitles

Home Sweet Home explores the connection of Pakistani queer people with 'home'. How do queer people navigate through intimacy, belonging, and the future and create a place like 'home' in a country where their existence is illegal?

This anthropological documentary uses the method of autoethnography, to document the 'self' to establish the positioning in the film, yet keeping the identity of the participants hidden. Using the help of ethno-fiction and sensory methods of filming to focus on the truth rather than visibility because visibility, without protection, can cause negative consequences for marginalized people. The film follows a non-linear story-telling structure while playing with the content to create a sense of belonging and vulnerability.



## LIFE ON A BACKROAD

Dir: Syed Ali Asghar, Duration: 33 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

This hybrid documentary revolves around 3 individuals in Pakistan and their struggles for survival. Bisma, a fashion photographer and model in her late 20s from Karachi. She walks us through her life, her struggles, family conflicts and her relationship with her religion and God. In different interviews in the span of 3 years we see her grow as a person and achieve many of her goals and ambitions.

Eza, a student from Lahore takes us into the life of a young bisexual girl trying to explore, accept and express herself openly. She talks about the internalized bi-phobia within the queer community of Pakistan. Mani, a social/gender activist who identifies as a trans-man and runs an organization for trans rights in Pakistan. He talks about his transition from FTM. The film tries to bind these three stories together to give the viewer a raw glimpse into the different dynamics of Trans, Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer lives in Pakistan.



## SHE HERSELF

Dir: Navid Ghadimi, Duration: 41 min, Country: Iran, Language: Farsi with English Subtitles

"She, Herself" is about Iranian female nonconformity in the diaspora. It represents an Iranian female identity in Berlin who lives not too much according to the expectations of the regime. Between the lines of sensorial cinematography, this experimental observation is also about other motives of an Iranian woman's psychic life.



## RAJA BRO - Acceptance Story of an Indian Transman

Dir: Sridhar Rangayan, Duration: 26 min, Country: India, Language: Hindi, Marathi and English with English Subtitles

RAJA BHAU is a sensitive heart-warming story of an Indian transman's acceptance, by himself and his family. Merlin, born as a girl, felt right from his childhood that he was trapped in the wrong gender. But it took a lot of courage and determination for Merlin to transition to become a transman. With unflinching support from his mother who has stood with

him through thick and thin, and acceptance by his cousins, aunts and uncles, Merlin now is proud of his gender identity. Having had two transformation surgeries, Merlin is a fitness freak, and spends his non-office hours in the gym.



# MADE IN PAKISTAN

“Made in Pakistan” explores the untold stories and talents in Pakistan through the medium of films and art. This happens to be the most popular programme of the Aks festival every year, and also helps us promote and celebrate local films and artists. Made in Pakistan is also part of Aks OutReach programme and will be used for the educational and awareness purposes in Pakistan and at other International film and art festivals. For booking please contact [info@aksfestival.com](mailto:info@aksfestival.com)

## THE HAZARA, A Case for Identity

Dir: Safar Ali Danish, Duration: 12 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Farsi with English subtitles

In this cinematically rich and important documentary, Hazara filmmaker, Safar Ali Danish, explores the Hazara identity being an ethnic minority in Pakistan through interviews of Hazara musicians, activists and culturalists. Hazaras are known for their distinctive music and literary traditions with a rich oral history and poetry. Hazaragi poetry and music are mainly folkloric, having been passed down orally through the generations. Despite being focused on exploring the cultural heritage of Hazaras, Safar raises questions about how this indigenous identity of Hazaras in Pakistan is perceived? What are the stereotypes, biases and stigmas towards this centuries old nation with a rich and diverse cultural heritage and history.

## KATAS RAJ

Dir: Abu bakar Ghaffar, Duration: 12 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

Pakistan is full of many cultures and civilizations, many cultures exist here, one of which is Hinduism, which started with Shri Katas Raj and then spread throughout the sub-continent. This documentary gives a glimpse of the beginnings of Hinduism, how the first foundations of Hinduism were laid in the subcontinent and how the Pandavs themselves spent twelve years of exile. Lord Shiva's symbol of love is also present in Katas Raj in the form of a pond which gives a message of love to the whole world. It conveys the message that if the god of destruction can be so sad for his love, then how sad should we as human beings be? There are many other cultures in Pakistan apart from Hinduism to work on and reflect on. It is our responsibility to do it in a legitimate film.

## HELP ME

Dir: Faseeh Bari Khan, Duration: 22 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

Shama, a school teacher, lives with her 10 year's old daughter Toto. Her strenuous life, being a single mother with a small salary, makes her give into the filthy demands of the wicked school headmaster. Whilst the young careless Toto dreams only to celebrate her coming birthday party with cakes and grand festivities. Being exposed to the man's owned society where woman's vulnerability is always at stake, Shama is extremely concerned for innocent Toto and teaches her young daughter about the good touch and bad touch on children by others and she prepares her to scream loud and say “HELP ME”, in certain situations. When the time comes, is there a chance for Toto to scream “Help Me” out loud enough while it's needed most.

## AAJ RANG HAI .... LAAL

Dir: Faseeh Bari Khan, Duration: 22 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

Laali, a naive teenager from a small village is married off to her much older twice widowed, truck driver cousin Kamaal, who is not only a patriarch but also a womanizer and



a drug addict. Laali is now living a miserable newly married life in the city. An encounter with the next door neighbor Maya, brings a hope in her life. Maya not only befriends Laali but also helps her live childhood dreams of driving a car in the big city. Maya trains Laali to be proficient at driving, while keeping this a secret from Kamaal who strongly rejects the idea of women behind the car steering. Maya's friendship and encouragement boosts a new confidence and excitement into Laali's life.

Until a day when only a driver can save Kamaal's life, will Laali reveal her newly learnt skill or remain unbothered to help her disgraceful husband?

## **RAQS-E-JUNOON**

Dir: Salina Khan, Duration: 11 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

Noorulain, an emerging poetess and author, pens down her own love story in a published novel Raqs-e-Junoon. When she finally gathers courage to give this novel to her beloved, the journey may not be so easy, not only due to the unpleasant weather that causes long train delays, but also the fear of confrontal for their uncommon love.

## **BHEETAR**

Dir: Mazhar Moin, Duration: min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

A tale of unconditional love, when the two lovers longing for each other is indescribable and beyond societal understanding and acceptance. They risk everything for their love without having a thought for what the consequences may be for their taboo love.

## **BABAR**

Dir: Mazhar Moin, Duration: 28 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

Babar is a young gender non-confirming person, who is battling between gender identity, familial pressure and societal injustice. Babar lives in a working class family with an aggressive brother and a loving and protective mother, who worries for her child's safety from violence at home as well as from the vicious society outside. Babar falls in love with Rehan, a cunning and foul man, who emotionally manipulates Babar to make choices that may be the most regrettable.

## **DYAD**

Dir: Ammara Khalid, Duration: 17 min, Country: Pakistan, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

Gender transition is a taboo in Pakistan. People are harassed, stigmatized, stabbed and even killed for pursuing it. "Dyad" is a story of a trans man who not only went through gender transition but also fought hard to make his identity known and accepted in the face of all challenges. It is a journey of trauma and scars. But above all, it's a journey of "self actualization".

## **KHAWAJA SIRAS: Pakistan's Trans Community in Between Tradition and Modernity**

Dir: Mariam Wolter, Duration: 30 min, Country: Pakistan and Germany, Language: Urdu with English subtitles

The Khawaja Sira community has been instrumental in bringing about a number of changes in the political environment of Pakistan, including the passage of the Trans-gender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2018. The documentary examines the recent political developments in Pakistan and presents the perspectives of members of the community and activists.

# Q\* POP

Like-minded people who often feel left out of the dominant culture sometimes come together and create subcultures. A subculture will have symbols that differentiate themselves from the dominant culture. These symbols support the subculture's identity. These symbols show up in music, style, image, tastes, and perceptions. Music is the main element in these short films, that may be far apart but share the common musical language that makes them express and come together in a unique and celebratory way.

## WARSHA

Dir: Dania Bdeir, Duration: 15 min, Country: France and Lebanon, Language: Arabic with English subtitles

Mohammad is a crane operator working in Beirut. One morning he volunteers to take on one of the tallest and notoriously most dangerous cranes in Lebanon. Away from everyone's eyes, he is able to live out his secret passion and find freedom.

## HABIB AND THE THIEF

Dir: Naures Sager, Duration: 15 min, Country: Sweden, Language: English, Arabic and Swedish with English subtitles

"Habib & The Thief" follows the intimate relationship between Habib and Amir, their strong bond is undeniable. Unfortunately, it isn't the time for their love in this lifetime as Amir, pressured by his family, chooses to marry a woman. Their breakup encourages Habib who decides to come out to his own parents.

## 1-1

Dir: Naures Sager, Duration: 7 min, Country: Sweden, Language: Arabic and Swedish with English subtitles

Ayman's hook up date with Jonas turns out to be a party. Crashed by fun friends, upbeat music, quirky disco lights, and a surprising dream sequence, what more do we need to transform a studio apartment into a club.

## TANK FAIRY

Dir: Erich Rettstadt, Duration: 10 min, Country: Taiwan, Language: Taiwanese with English subtitles

The magical Tank Fairy delivers her tanks unlike any other - with sass, stilettos and a healthy helping of glitter. Her arrival upends the life of Jojo, a lonely ten-year-old who dreams of dancing and drag. Outcast by classmates and misunderstood by his stern, single mom, Jojo is inspired to live out loud by his fierce, propane-toting fairy godmother.

## ACCEPTANCE

Dir: Huzzaddy, Duration: 3 min, Country: Pakistan, Music: M.I.A

Jaan-e-Haseena hopes to invoke an imagination of young, queer joy and pride in Lahore that acknowledges the danger the public sphere poses for their expression, but highlights the triumphs of those who are on a journey to overcome those fears

## ZANAAN-KHAANA

Dir: Huzzaddy, Duration: 3 min, Country: Pakistan, Music: M.I.A

Zanaan-Khaana is imagined as a feminine space where queer and trans youth can thrive in their individual fluidities. Using a backdrop of a tamer/more culturally-conservative Lahori background, Jaan-e-Haseena hopes to invoke an imagination of what beautiful, queer/trans friendly public spaces can look like in Lahore.

## MUJRA

Dir: Saadat Munir, Duration: 5 min, Country: Pakistan, Music: Moderate

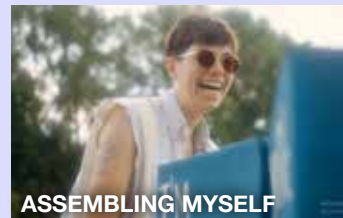
Mujra, is an experimental video that tries to explore the unique art form of Mujra that the Lahori Khawja Siras are known for. The core idea of this video is to express a narrative of a performing art that is not valued as an art form but somehow helps the local transgender community for their survival as being one of the very few options of earning.





# AKS SHORTS BUNDLE

A mix of selected 14 distinct films from around the world tailored into a milestone Aks program. Keeping the global trends of inclusivity and diversity in account, this programme captures issues and topics that are related to socio-political, gender and minorities and even some romance based films into a single program. The program includes 2 documentaries and 12 short films.



## THE ONES WE CHOOSE

Dir: Elora Bertrand, Duration 29 min Country: France, Language: French with English subtitles

“The ones we choose” is a documentary about my chosen family. The ones I decided to walk through life alongside with. First taking the form of a family video this documentary takes us from the intimate to the collective, from the intimate to the political.

## BEFORE YOU GO

Dir: Vicente del Río, Hans von Marées, Duration:14 min, Country: Chile, with English subtitles

The last weekend before the start of the college year separates them, Daniel faces his last chance to come clean about his feelings for his best friend Franco while they take shelter from a storm trespassing a cabin in Patagonia.

## ASSEMBLING MYSELF

Dir: Yumi Mates, Duration: 8 min Country: Netherlands, Language: English with English subtitles

This dreamy, fluid film invites you into the world of two queer artists and their ideas about societal gender norms, belonging and mental health. Within their music and spoken word they reveal new worlds, with more possibilities, flexible and without borders.

## CANCR

Dir: Brittany Alstot, Duration 15 mins, Country: United States, Language: English with English subtitles

Cancr is a sweet romance. Tomas’ world has gotten smaller since his cancer diagnosis and treatment. Now in remission, he meets Dustin on Cancr, the dating app for people with cancer. Their summer romance may be brief, but the care and understanding that passes between them opens something beautiful for both young men.

## TUNE OF LIFE

Dir: Akash Manhore, Duration 4 mins, Country: India, Language: Musical

Enduring their own obstacles the flute performer’s inner soul rhythm tunes with the soul of the forlorn by alleviating their agony.

## YELLOW POLKA DOT

Dir: Tin Nguyen, Duration: 16 min Country: United States, Language: English with English Subtitles

Sandra and Barbara are enjoying a day at the beach with their partners in 1962. The night before they all went out to a nightclub. The men bonded, as well as the women, albeit in very different fashions.

## WHILE I'M STILL BREATHING

Dir: La Fille Raneé, Duration: 13 min Country: France , Language: English with English Subtitles

While I'm still breathing is the blurred portrayal of a young woman through three steps of her sexuality. In a three movement narrative, the movie depicts the roughness and softness of the journey through a woman's sexuality. From that little girl inspired by the painted models of Paul Delvaux and Klimt, to her first sensual gestures as a teenager and her experience as a stripper, we gradually see a woman unfold. With great intimacy and sensitivity, she reveals herself through the sensual relationship to her own femininity and to those who once shared her intimacy.

## TO ALL THAT WE ARE

Dir: Kristian Cahatol, Duration: 5 min Country: Canada, Language: English with English Subtitles

"To All that we are" is A dreamlike love story exploring the newfound relationship between two queer twenty-somethings.

## OUTSIDERS

Dir: Hannah Cauhepe, Duration: 10 min Country: France, Language: French with English Subtitles

In Erdogan's Turkey, being queer isn't a crime (yet), but it can still make your life a living hell. Which is why some members of the community have decided to claim their right to exist, loud and proud, with a soccer ball.

## CHEEPATAKADUMPA

Dir: Devashish Makhija, Duration: 24 min Country: Indias, Language: Hindi with English Subtitles

'CHEEPATAKADUMPA' follows three women over less than a day as they awaken their naughty teenage alter egos when they meet again after years, unleashing mischief on each other, and in turn on the biased patriarchal belief systems of the India they were born into. In a masculine culture that is unduly serious about making the rules that women are expected to live by, can Teja, Santo and Tamanna find true and happy rebellion in the gasping throes of this mischief?

## CYCLE

Dir: Devashish Makhija, Duration: 20 min Country: India, Language: Tribal and Hindi with English Subtitles

'Cycle' is the story of a wronged young tribal woman who, in the absence of systemic justice, turns rebel, but struggles to be able to fulfill all the expectations that the path to retribution demands. 'Cycle' is a multilingual short film shot on a phone camera as found footage, and filmed in three uninterrupted long takes. The film features a large and ethnically varied cast, most of whom were facing a camera for the first time ever.

## PLEASE GOD HEAL HER

Dir:Tzliil Golov, Duration: 16 min Country: Israel, Language: Hebrew with English Subtitles

Ruth, a religious married woman "in the closet", undergoes conversion therapy and prays for a miracle which will heal her heart from her love for a neighbor, a religious woman cello player. What happens when God forces her to confront her passion at a decisive holy moment?

## SPEAK IN WHISPER

Directed by Chongyan, Duration: 35 min Country: France, Language: French with English Subtitles

"Speak in Whisper" is a heart touching film. In the middle of what would have otherwise been a banal evening, everything Céleste has been trying to hide comes to light.

## JOUISSANCE

Dir: Sadeq Es-haqi, Duration: 23 min Country: Iran, Language: Percian/English with English Subtitles

"Jouissance" is the story of Arash and Rahi. Arash and Rahi are a gay couple from Tehran. They've recently moved into a new house. However, their everyday routine is disrupted by the ghost of Rahi's ex-boyfriend, who died six years ago and is now asking Rahi to continue living with him.



# RECLAIMING QUEERNESS

by **ADAN RANA**

Our world – a postmodern dystopia. Precarious & porous. As new ideas & cultures diffuse through borders, local queer communities find themselves at the heart of a so-called global Clash of Civilizations. Historically, no neatly alphabetized, diagrammatically illustrated spectrum of LGBTIQ+ ever existed in traditional societies to serve as a manual for individuals exploring their sexual or gender identity. Unfortunately it seems, the radical liberals are almost dangerously obsessed with this intense need for categorization. You must be this, so you can't be that. If you are this, you can't possibly be that! A never-ending, self-defeating riddle that has created, in very tangible and practical ways, division in countries like Pakistan – where queer cultures have existed since the historic eras of Mughals & Lodhis. But the woke vocab: this new, pedantic jargon, to help one self-identify and (by default) otherise, is still all very new.

Nowhere was this more painfully obvious than the recent backlash against the pro-trans law in force across the country. Reckless hate spearheaded by an unelected, unimportant few on the far-Right, the Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 was bashed by smartphone-bound religious zealots for promoting immorality in the name of gender expression. Forgetting that this has gender is not always expressed for sexual ends or intents. And sparking the age-old debate between the proponents of 'socially-constructed' gender and the defenders of 'biologically-defined' sexual identity. Zooming out on this, those on the global far-Right are also no different in their R for Rigidity– from Ben Shapiro to Andrew Tate going to notorious lengths to establish how sex & gender are innately interlinked in a tight binary. As a progressive queer Muslim, I concede to them insofar as statistics allow me. Yes, it may be true that for the vast majority of the cis-world – men and women's biology has a deep-rooted and deterministic impact on their behavioral tendencies.

But here's what the Right always gets wrong: when it comes to the question of minorities such as the Khwaja Siraahs of Pakistan, a distinct cultural group – where do we draw the line? Designer-turned-activists like Maria Butt have been critical of the impetus for trans\* rights in Pakistan – opining that only the members of the intersex community can or should be afforded rights or protections under Shariah – the Islamic Law.

A law that is not entirely in force in Pakistan to begin with. But the real question is how many, and where exactly are the members of the intersex community the Right vociferously but exclusively supports? In fact many members of the local queer community were keen & quick to call out the



newly-inspired, seemingly divinely ordained activist for inviting a trans\* activist Julie Khan to speak on behalf of the intersex community during an interview in her house. The experiences of the intersex and transgender communities are markedly not the same! As it is, the overwhelming majority of the Khwaja Sirah community do, in fact, undergo either transition, and are, by all means, part of this global network of transgender communities. Only a very minuscule fraction of the queer community in Pakistan are inter-sex at birth – that is, born with a combination of male and female genitalia. Most Khwaja Sirahs on the other hand – who we see dancing for the rich in Pakistani weddings, and begging on signals, are the real social minority to protect. A number that goes in the hundreds of thousands – a demographic spread across rural towns and urban centers from Peshawar to Karachi; from Lahore to Multan.

For the vast majority, the Khwaja Sirahs or moorats as they often like to call themselves, are not born with mixed genitalia. Nevertheless, it is this distinct subpopulation, defined by culture and not biology, that are the most visible and vulnerable at once. Most likely to be bullied, alienated & targeted by organized criminal syndicates like Beelas. As a Muslim, I find this stream of transphobic violence, patterns of which are worst in parts of KPK, to be much more reprehensible and sinful than a complete communal way of life that is based on values of love, identity, language, and justice. Within a divine order of justice that seeks to balance good against evil, it is not for the State, or the courts, or least of all, individual citizens to draw the line as to when an act of gender expression becomes criminal. What does amount to criminals is the attempt to control, defile and assault the bodies of transgender victims of violence – many of whom are unable to see the justice they deserve in their lifetimes.

## About the Author

*The author is a transgender lawyer and writer based in Lahore.*



## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

We are an inclusive festival and are completely free of cost. All we need from you is to Sign Up via email or whatsapp for the events you would like to join us. Booking email addresses and Whatsapp numbers are stated below according to the cities.

### How to sign up for the Aks festival?

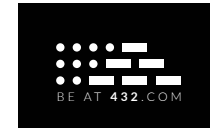
Please select the city and the relevant email address or text message for the event, then send us an email with the title/s of the event/s, your full name, and phone number. If you are bringing friends, we would like to have the name/s and phone number/s for each person. We may also encourage you to give us the information about how and where you heard about us.

#### Lahore/Multan/Faisalabad:

Email: Lahore@aksfestival.com /  
Whatsapp: 0334-4244453 0306-0353204

Email: Karachi@aksfestival.com  
/Whatsapp: 0300 3490469  
Multan Whatsapp 0303 0044545  
Faisalabad Whtasapp 03187088718

Upon receiving your details, we will reply to confirm your reservation/booking and disclose the venue address. We would like to thank you on behalf of the Aks International Minorities Festival for your interest and support.



Kingdom of the Netherlands



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**We would like to thank you on behalf of the  
Aks International Minorities Festival  
for your interest and support**