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PATIENTS IN CELLULOID: EMPLOYING MOVIES AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL TO STUDY THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EXIGENCIES OF HIV/AIDS PATIENTS

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ABSTRACT

Though the developments in medical science have managed to prolong the lives of HIV positive patients, suicidal ideations and depression still mar their quality of life. The social taboos and stigmas surrounding this disease further exacerbate their condition. The only source of succour for most patients is their doctors, from whom they end up expecting more than mere medical support. Thus, the onus of ensuring the mental and physical wellness of their patients fall on the shoulders of the doctors, who, owing to their workload or occupational hazards like desensitization, might not be in a position to determine the exact nature of their psychosocial needs. The aim of this paper is to explore the scope of instructional use of movies in priming the medical students to ably handle such needs using the celluloid as an instrument of learning.

KEYWORDS: HIV/AIDS, Patients, Psychosocial Needs, Movies, Instruction

INTRODUCTION

The reality is that HIV/AIDS is no longer the nightmare it was during the nineteen eighties. It is so because "The idea of HIV as a chronic disease has emerged as a result of advances in treatment in the past three decades" (Deeks 1525). According to the US National Centre for Health Statistics, those diseases, that last for three months or more fall under the category of chronic diseases. Further, these diseases can neither be prevented using vaccines nor can they be cured completely using medications. "When used correctly, ART (Antiretroviral Therapy) results in rapid control of HIV and partial restoration of immune function, leading to prevention of the various complications that defineAIDS" (Deeks1526). It thus aids in the enhancement of the quality of life of the concerned individuals and hence, manages to ameliorate the alarming conditions associated with this debilitating disease. Antony Stephen Fauci, the renowned American immunologist, HIV/AIDS researcher and the institute executive of National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, on an optimistic note, mentions how

The fight against HIV/AIDS is currently viewed with considerably more optimism than in years past because powerful interventions have been developed, scientifically proven effective, and refined. If these tools are made widely available to those who need them, an AIDS-free generation may be possible—that is, today's children could one day live in a world in which HIV infections and deaths from AIDS are rare. (Fauci 343)

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WHAT IS HIV/AIDS?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the attack of which if left untreated can lead to AIDS or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. HIV attacks the white blood cells called CD4 cells, which is a vital component of our immune system. The virus gets into these cells, makes its own copies and then kills them. The new copies of the virus repeat the pattern and slowly the number of CD4 cells become so low that the infected person falls sick very often due to a compromised immune system. AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection, and the patient, more often than not, succumbs to the various opportunistic infections. However, timely diagnosis and adequate treatment has made it possible to prolong the clinical latency period, and thus, makes it possible to lead a productive life. Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) abates the progression of HIV in the blood, consequently delaying the occurrence of AIDS. Nevertheless, the branding of AIDS as a sexually transmitted disease (STD), and the general fear of catching the disease has made living with it in the society a torment in itself, not to mention the ills of the lack of adequate information about this condition.

Few Diseases Have Ever Been Feared and Abhorred with the Same Intensity as HIV/AIDS

The scope of the AIDS pandemic, the possibility of death and disfigurement from the disease, and confusion and doubt regarding modes of HIV transmission all elicit and sustain a climate of fear regarding AIDS. Combined with moral condemnation of individuals most at risk for the disease, these factors have produced a response bordering on hysteria. The concerns of health professionals about the possibility of contracting AIDS from patients have been widely reported. (Marshall 2016)

To trace the roots of the causes that are spawning these sentiments in people in response to this disease, the world over alike, would be to unmask the pseudo-morality, among other things, that is still reigning high in our societies. Anatural corollary of such an investigation would then be to study the various psychosocial needs of the AIDS patients, engendered by the societal aversion, and why it is important for the doctors to pay attention to them. It is also equally crucial to undertake preventive measures and interventionist actions to curb the spread of this disease through timely identification of the vulnerable groups in our society and provide them adequate support and awareness.

INDIAN MOVIES WITH HIV/AIDS AS THEME

In recent times, these concerns have slowly made it to popular entertainment mediums like cinemas. Films, in general, contribute significantly to the evolving social and cultural discourses surrounding HIV/AIDS. They function as a source of educative entertainment to the public at large. Unlike documentaries which at times tend to be too didactic and fail to arrest the attention of the common people, mainstream feature films with popular star casts manage to have a captivating effect and even elicit positive responses from the audience and get them thinking about the hitherto hushed issues like HIV/AIDS. Like any other art form, cinema thrives on the popularity factor, but more so on account of the heavy investment that goes into its making. The makers of feature films are wary of anything that can put their investment in jeopardy and steers clear of themes that might not be acceptable to the audience. But going against the grain, a few adventurous filmmakers have actually

created movies dealing with unpopular subjects like HIV/AIDS in a bid to normalize and mainstream these issues

Dr. Sathyaraj Venkatesan from NIT Trichy, in an article published in The Hindu, mentions his take on the recent cinematic ventures into the areas hitherto mostly left neglected by the makers of feature films in India.

Indian cinema had virtually ignored HIV/AIDS as a theme owing to the difficulty in adapting the stigmatized AIDS and sympathetically tackling it to fit the needs of commercial movie-goers. Although mainstream Bollywood response to the epidemic was tardy, the present decade has seen filmmakers integrating HIV/AIDS into commercial movies. The response began with Mahesh Manjrekar's "Nidaan" (2000) followed by Revathy's "PhirMilenge" (2004), Onir's "My Brother Nikhil" (2005) and Father Dominic Emmanuel's "AisaKyonHotaHai" (2006). 68 Pages (2007) directed by Sridhar Rangayan is perhaps one of the earliest films to tackle the issue of HIV/AIDS among Men who have Sex with Men (MSM). Parallel to Bollywood's representation of HIV/AIDS, the regional cinematic response started with the Marathi film "ZindagiZindabad" (1998) produced by the Humsafar Trust. Sasidharan Pillai's Malayalam film "KaatuVannuVilichappol" (2001) and Vishal Bhandari's Marathi film "Kaalchakra" (2007) which was nominated for the UNICEF award, are the other significant HIV/AIDS movies. (Venkatesan 1)

These movies implicitly or explicitly attribute paramount importance to the psychosocial aspects of this pandemicand makes plain the need to take cognizance of them. Psychosocial aspects refer to the internal (psychological) and external (social) factors that have a profound effect on the being and functioning of an individual. Efforts need to be taken to comprehend the inevitable convolutedness of these determinants in the life of the infected patients. This will help in forestalling their adverse ramifications both at the individual and the community level. Contextualizing the disease, like in the movies, affords a lucid insight about the disparate radices of anathematization and the resultant alienation of the sick, while concomitantly paying attention to the predicaments of the healthcare providers.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EXIGENCIES OF HIV/AIDS PATIENTS IN MOVIES

The occurrence of HIV/AIDS is never a one-off incident because there is always a continuum of which it unwittingly becomes a part. The pattern it assumes is that of a very long tale made up of assorted individual accounts having the appearance of mutual exclusivity, but, is in reality inextricably linked to the narratives that flag them on both the sides. AIDS Jaago, a collection of four short films made along the lines of feature films with popular star casts, was an upstanding enterprise of the famous Indian American film director Mira Nair, created in collaboration with her production company Mirabai Films and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, along with their sponsored initiative Avahan, in order to precipitate AIDS awareness in the country. The four short films are Prarambha (directed by Santosh Sivan), Migration (directed by Mira Nair), Positive (directed by Farhan Akhtar) and Blood Brothers(directed by Vishal Bhardwaj). All the four movies have carefully given—a wide berth to starchy didacticism while concurrently striving to serve as deterrents to the escalation of the crisis through incautious deeds of the public.

Mira Nair's Migration beautifully delineates the steady progression of the contemporary AIDS discourse, where there is an ineluctable imbrication of the personal narratives of individuals that finally culminates in a vicious unbreakable repetitive pattern. What is appalling about this scenario is that every time a narrative takes shape from the previous one, there is an

unravelling of a tragedy that is strangely reminiscent of all the past ones to the point that a diligent observer cannot but question the failure of the society in having overseen the obvious and let the affliction grip the fabric of the society with its tenacious claws. Birju, played by Shiney Ahuja, is a farmer- turned- construction worker, who, plagued by the debts incurred through droughts, is forced to leave his village for the city in search of work. In Mumbai, he encounters a victim of a loveless marriage, Divya, played by Sameera Reddy, and lets himself be used to fulfilling her sexual desire in return for a gold chain. As the story unfolds, it is shown that he has infected his wife and the new-born with HIV brought back from the city, that is, from Divya to be more precise. It is left for the audience to conclude that the source of the infection is possibly Abhay, played by Irrfan Khan, who is also a closet homosexual and Divya's husband.

Notice how events as disparate as drought instigated mass migration from villages to cities, poverty, sexual repression within marriages, stigma surrounding homosexuality, etc. contribute to the framing of an AIDS narrative which is a mere continuation of similar tales that have unfolded before, into which innocents get dragged, quite often for no fault of their own. Appropriate measures at the right time can ensure a certain disruption in the progression of this narrative. But, for people like Birju, belonging to the lowest strata of the society, catering to their socio-economic needs is as important as their psychosocial needs. The sad reality is that there are millions of people still dying due to lack of access to AIDS drugs. The socio-economic exigencies of this class thus exertsan adverse influence on the various psychosocial determinants.

These movies remind us that there is a constant multidirectional flux in the cause and effect phenomenon surrounding HIV/AIDS, between the subject's micro and macro environment. Santosh Sivan's Prarambhatells how the microenvironment can be made better by the changes in the macro environment. It is the story of an HIV positive kid named Kittu, whose right to life and education is reinstated by the efforts of a smart driver Puttaswamy Gowda, played by Prabhu Deva, using the media and with the help of the law of the land. It is a sad truth that even in schools, that are supposed to be the centers of knowledge, discrimination is sometimes indiscriminately practised.

A small segment of the educational community argues that we are talking about a horrendous disease, and we should not take chances. They argue that we don't admit children with whooping cough, measles, mumps, or tuberculosis into school, and the same should be true with respect to AIDS victims. In some cases, parents have protested and boycotted schools when children or teachers with AIDS continue in school. In a few cases, parents have withdrawn their children from school, especially where the children are in class with a student diagnosed as having AIDS. (Ornstein 135)

Kittu's microenvironment is left in shambles when his mother, who is also HIV positive, refuses to acknowledge him and even his educational prospects are uncertain owing to his disease. The elements of the macro environment, including the media and the judiciary intervenes to restore balance to his microenvironment. Then there is the even more relevant issue of lack of information or misinformation regarding the cause and spread of the disease. Again this is another area where the medical establishments can make its invaluable contributions.

The University of North Carolina School of Medicine has mentioned in their website how "recent large, long term studies show that HIV and AIDS patients with chronic depression and trauma are about twice as likely to die from AIDS-related causes", according to Leserman, Ph.D., sociologist, professor of psychiatry in the UNC School of Medicine and coeditor of the special journal issue subtitled "Psychosocial Influences in HIV/AIDS: Biobehavioral Mechanisms, Interventions

and Clinical Implications." The territory encompassing the correlation between the immune system and the psychosocial aspects, played upon by various physiological and behavioral mediators is yet to be mapped. A comprehensive long term strategy to combat HIV/AIDS also involves ensuring the cooperation of the patients in the treatment regime. Not adhering to the therapy can be a cause of worry not merely for the concerned individual, but for the community at large. This is so because the irregular administration of the drugs can cause HIV to mutate resulting in the development of more virulent-drug resistant strains. Also, regulated lifestyle and proper diet is also a must to ensure proper pharmacokinetics.

The movie Phir Milenge(2004), directed by Revathi, deals with the theme of AIDS in the professional spaces, and relates the story of Tamanna Sahni, played by Shilpa Shetty, a creative director at TJ Associates, an advertising agency, who was ousted from the firm on the revelation of her HIV positive status, in the pretext of incompetence. The rest of the movie narrates how she fights the firm and makes her point, by taking the recourse of law. Though her colleagues and a few acquaintances distance themselves, her sister Tanya, and several of their friends stay by her side throughout the fight. In a particularly revealing scene between Tamanna, her lawyer Tarun Anand, played by Abhishek Bachchan, and his mentor Lal, played by Nassar, it is made known to the public how there are several legal and other complications surrounding wrongful dismissal cases in India.

Phir Milenge underscores the importance of concerted efforts of different segments of the society in normalizing the life of AIDS patients. Though the starting point of such endeavors is verily the hospitals, sometimes their role gets constricted because of the diverse demands typical of the life of any individual. To ensure the proper health of their patients, doctors ought to get them to stick to the treatment regimes, which can prove to be a challenge if the troubles in their personal or professional life interfere with their mental well-being. The nature of these troubles being directly linked to their HIV positive status, it is natural that the medical practitioners feel helpless for not being in a position to cater to their psychosocial needs. This is where agencies external to the sphere of medicine can come forward to make things easier for the physicians. Doctors can use movies to understand the different needs of their patients and try to get them satisfied by figuring out ways to work with different organizations (NGOs, legal aids workers, etc.). Thus, it helps increase the scope of their profession beyond the immediate medical needs of their patients by keeping in mind the possible limitations of their service and by engaging in creative interactions with possible sources of support.

After having accepted the reality of her condition, Tamanna decides to get her life back in order. Though she faces hurdles, an admirable will to live her life to the fullest keeps her going and she manages to live her dreams. However, this is quite different from what happened to the eponymous character Nikhil from the movie My Brother Nikhil, directed by Onir in 2005. This particular movie is remarkable for having been based on the real life of Dominic D'Souza, an otherwise healthy youngster from Goa, who was quarantined for over two months in the year 1989, for being Goa's patient zero, aided by a few draconian laws. Nikhil, played by Sanjay Suri, is a state swimming champion, whose career ends abruptly on being diagnosed HIV positive. One cannot but mull over the reduced priority given to the team doctor in the movie, who, apart from hinting about his HIV positive status does little to help him tide over the initial shock. Thus, the doctor figure is conspicuous through his inaction, quite the opposite of what happened in the real life of Dominic D'Souza.

Though the movie underplayed the doctor figure, it leaves room for introspection regarding the possible ways in which a doctor could have contributed to ameliorating the circumstances. Further, since the movie was based on the real life of a person, quite naturally it got the people talking, and the real incident in the background slowly started getting foregrounded. It would be a gross mistake to disregard the contributions of doctors like Dr. Iswar Gilada on whose request Mr. Anand Grower, a lawyer from Mumbai, appeared for Dominic. Both Dr. Iswar Gilada, and Anand Grower had been active in programmes aimed at winning the rights of the AIDS patients. However, the outcome of the case was not exactly in their favor, but, it did manage to draw the attention of the lawmakers and authorities towards the oppressive laws and regulations in the country.

Movies also contribute significantly to boost collective efficacy, which can be defined as "the degree to which the people in a system believe that they can organize and execute courses of action required to achieve collective goals" (Singhal 15). The movies offer behavioral models that may or may not be acceptable to the viewers. But when these models are enacted by popular film stars, they tend to attract much more attention. The messages and the lessons that the films have to offer to succeed in permeating the community with relatively very little resistance. Even the most deeply ingrained sociocultural values and norms get interrogated in course of the debates and discussions that ensue. Medical practitioners are also the products of our society, susceptible to the very same misleading beliefs and notions. But when the fallacy unfolds via a drama in front of them, they become aware of their potential to function as agents of changethus getting encouraged to deliver better care.

A study conducted in TUMS (Tehran University of Medical Sciences) from February 2013 to June 2015probed the feasibility of using the medium of cinema to enhance the student doctor's apprehension of the psychosocial aspects of the art of medicine. A sample of two hundred and seventy student doctors was made part of the study that resorted to both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The study comprised of nine sessions of three to four hours each, which used nine carefully selected movies separately. The results of the study showed that "using movies can be helpful as an interactive teaching technique to teach medical humanism in medical school. Cinemedicine provides the opportunity for medical students to learn psychosocial subjects related to medicine through observing and reflecting on the movie" (Kadivar 26).

The desire to live, more than anything else, is what keeps human beings alive, and makes them fight against odds and keep moving forward. Treatments of any kind is always a two-way process and require the cooperation of the patients and their kith and kin along with the service of the physicians. As mentioned above, with the combination drug therapy, HIV has taken on the characteristics similar to that of other chronic illnesses, which can be prevented from fulminating through proper medication and regulated lifestyle. But unlike other illnesses, a patient suffering from HIV/AIDS quite often faces a social death prior to the imminent physical death. It zaps even the remotest desire or will that people have to survive. Such a bend of mind can be detrimental to the health of the patient. Therefore it is vital that doctors and other health care providers also cater to the emotional and psychological needs of the patients.

In the year 1989, Dr. Michael W Ross, while working as a senior research fellow at Sydney Hospital, happened to write an article in the Journal of medical ethics titled "Psychosocial ethical aspects of AIDS". He alludes to the precariousness of any and all sorts of judgements surrounding HIV/AIDS infection by tracing it as one of the root causes of psychological, emotional and social distress. In fact, the fear of judgements quite often prevents people from opening up about their condition,

even entering into a mode of denial, which can deprive them of the much required medical treatments. "Moral judgements made regarding HIV infection may also harm the common good by promoting conditions which may increase the spread of HIV infection" (Ross 74). In the movie Blood Brothers, the blood reports of two men of the same name, Arjun Dutt, get mixed up, leading the wrong Arjun played by Siddharth into believing that he is HIV positive. He, having had an extramarital fling recently, is consumed by guilt and leaves his family, for fear of having infected his pregnant wife, and being subjected to their family's judgements about his character.

Soon, the misunderstanding is cleared and Arjun musters enough courage to tell the other guy of his HIV positive status, only to come to know that he had been knowing it all along. Pankaj Kapur plays the HIV positive patient who deals with his condition with optimism and bravado. Had Siddharth's character been HIV positive in reality, his decision to run away would have done little to help him keep AIDS at bay. Proper counseling by the physicians can help a lot in bracing the patient for what lay ahead in terms of treatment and their social life.

"... an individual's fear of HIV infection is reliably managed only by individual counseling. When counseling is not provided or is insufficient, severe, chronic psychological or psychiatric disturbance may result. Suicides have occurred, for example, where counseling services have been absent" (Miller 1671).

FEASIBILITY OF USING MOVIES AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL

Movies are like dress rehearsals in the sense that the future medicos get to see what lay beyond the pathology of their patients whom they will encounter in the future, or even during their internships. It will also help them figure out the extent and nature of their role in the grand scheme of things apropos of AIDS management, care, and prevention in the country and the world. In countries like India, where the doctor-patient ratio is skewed due to a burgeoning population, a clinician might not always get enough time to gauge the extent of the psychosocial needs of the patients. Hence they need to be primed for all sorts of eventualities right from their student days. It is also imperative that the movies chosen be such that they are consistent with the cultural milieus of the place, for which, it is practical to make effective use of the native movies as instruments of instruction.

The underlying idea of using movies to prime the medical students to assess the psychosocial exigencies of AIDS patients is to transform the process of internalization from a cognitive activity to an affective activity. The former can cause a medico to look at the diseased from a factual point of view and then resort to an instrumental use of their acquired skills, while the latter can equip him/her in making informed judgements regarding their patient's needs and conditions, and then take measures to make sure of their welfare, at times even by collaborating with external agencies, and not merely restricting their role to prescribing the treatment regime and the medicines. Further, movies contextualize diseases and being least didactic, leaves enough room for multiple interpretations. However, establishing the legitimacy of employing the celluloid as an instrument of instruction in medical colleges can prove to be a challenge at the outset due to multiple reasons.

Commercial movies are quite often criticized for being a far cry from actuality. Quite often cinematic narratives are characterized by an extrapolation of reality that might not sit well with the academic community. But it is for that very same reason that they make ideal teaching materials. The drama and the histrionics, which are quintessential elements of a

movie, especially in a country like India, are powerful triggers for arousing pathos in the viewers and sometimes even holds the potential to galvanize them into action. Since this formula does not fit within the rigid frameworks of the conventional academic pedagogy, the possibility of ascertaining its efficacy tangibly is almost impossible. It is not possible to present empirically the extent of influence movies have had on medicos or what lessons they have learned from it.

In the year 1990, Donnie J Self, Professor in the Department of Humanities in Medicine, Philosophy and Paediatrics, Texas A&M University, and Dewitt C Baldwin Jr., Director of the Division of Medical Education Research and Information of the American Medical Association, jointly came up with a paper titled "Teaching Medical Humanities Through Film Discussions", which was basically a description of a course. They concluded as below:

Implementation of the film discussion elective promoted close faculty-student relationships and close student-student relationships. In that sense the course role-modeled what was attempted in the course, namely, creating an ethical ideal of caring, relatedness, sensitivity to others, and so forth. Clearly, it promoted significant introspection, reflection, and critical self-analysis of values and their influence on interpersonal interactions with others. (Self 1990)

The use of the visual medium for educational purposes, especially to create awareness among the common people, has been taking place since the late twentieth century. It is popularly known as Entertainment-Education, a communication strategy which makes use of custom made entertainment programmes that have the potential to create awareness or educate the public about various social ills. But, unlike feature films, these pieces of work are excessively pedantic and direct the viewer's course of thinking. Their approach is too targeted, and the ultimate aim is to make the viewers think in a particular way, and the narratives are choreographed such that there is absolutely no room for ambiguity when it comes to interpreting them. The message is made crystal clear and mostly are supplemented with voiceovers and epilogues that reinforce the idea meant to be dispersed. But when it comes to professionals-in-making, directing their thought processes can meet with resistance owing to the awareness afforded by their knowledge, which in turn can lead them to counter questioning. While the laity needs to be educated, often to supplement their lack of awareness about specialized areas of knowledge, professionals-in-making need to be made aware of what they already know. Hence, the means that works for the former will not work for the latter, as the ends are different.

CONCLUSIONS

From the observations made in the paper, it is safe to conclude that AIDS-themed feature films made for the commercial audience can have an edifying effect on the medical students despite the relative lightness with which the subject is broached. For the same reason, they are as persuasive as instructive. Movies contextualize the disease, which reveals different dimensions of this pandemict hat is otherwise lost on the physicians who do not get to spend much time with their patients due to time constraints characteristic of their job. If not personally, , knowing about possible psychosocial needs of the patients can at least enable them in directing the patient to the apposite external agencies who might be able to lend them support.

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