

FILM REVIEW

Medicine—the best laughter

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How do they depict a doctor in Hindi films or TV serials? He is either a grave-faced, bespectacled, didactic person somberly announcing that either the mother or the child will survive, but not both, or he is a buffoon who is acted out by Johnny Lever, or some other comedian with outlandish mannerisms and remedies.

In this respect, *Munnabhai MBBS* comes across as a breath of fresh air. It is a comedy that does not laugh at doctors, rather it laughs with doctors at the medical education system. The movie can be viewed at different levels. At one level, it is a gut comedy in which a local don pretends to be a doctor to please his father. When his trickery is exposed, he vows to become a real doctor—more by crook than by hook! The acting by Sanjay Dutt, as Munnabhai and Sunil Dutt is excellent. Arshad Warsi as ‘Circuit’, the don’s right hand, is superb. However, the surprise packet is Boman Irani, who delights you with his understated role as Dean of the college and father of Munnabhai’s lady love.

As a doctor, I viewed this movie as a message for the medical fraternity. Munnabhai gets admission into a prestigious college by cheating in the exams. This would have been hilarious if it had not been true. Unfortunately, our dailies scream about how various entrance tests are manipulated, and how medical admission has become less of a competition and more of an auction.

The scene where juniors are made to strip and dance as a part of ragging are straight out of the newspapers. Munnabhai tries to view the dissection from behind a large flock of students and suddenly I was transported back to my student days, when we had to crane over heads to watch a patient. Our colleges today are as overcrowded as ever. Munnabhai grabs a mobile and orders his sidekick to get a separate and fresh body for himself. I applauded the dark humour of this scene.

Part of the movie becomes unnecessarily heavy and pedantic, when it advises doctors to treat patients as individuals and not as diseases or a bunch of symptoms. Though this is perfectly true, it comes across as a dreary

speech. Just like Robin Williams, in *Patch Adams*, Munnabhai also treats patients with a hug and a kiss, and a little bit of understanding.

Munnabhai communicates with the sweeper by just asking him his name. This scene made me pause and wonder if I knew the names of all the ward boys and *ayahs* who helped run the hospitals where I work. I am sure that I would be found sorely wanting.

The ease with which the Dean could make or break Munnabhai’s medical career chilled my heart. I recollected all the PG students who scurried to the market to buy vegetables for their guides, just to remain in their good books. Is it right, or rather, is it safe to give such power over another person to anyone, even if he is a senior doctor? Should we not ensure an influence-free exam, where only merit is evaluated?

There is one scene in the movie which is outstanding. Boman Irani suffers from hypertension. He uses laughter therapy to lower his blood pressure whenever he gets angry. Due to various misunderstandings, Munnabhai tells him that he no longer loves Chinki, his childhood sweetheart and Irani’s daughter. Irani pretends to commiserate with Munna, while secretly bubbling with joy. Then Munna explodes the bombshell. He tells Irani that now he actually loves Dr Suman, the real name of Chinki (Irani’s daughter). The play of emotions on Irani’s face is wonderful. For two minutes, this man does not utter a single syllable, and yet he conveys his futile attempt to laugh his hypertension away and his frustration at the irony of fate. The whole audience rolls with laughter during this part. This one sequence makes the whole movie worth watching.

When you leave the cinema hall, there is a smile on your lips. Most of the movie is couched in Bollywood hyperbole. However, somewhere deep down, you realise that beneath the laughter lie so many shortcomings of our medical education system, which Munnabhai subtly points out to us.