

FILM REVIEW

Phir milenge

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Phir Milenge (We'll meet again), the maiden directorial venture of south Indian actress Revathy, is a poignant story of HIV-infected persons. The story revolves around three themes—a human interest narrative, presentation of medical facts on HIV/AIDS, and an analysis of the social and legal impact of HIV infection.

Tamanna (Shilpa Shetty) is a highly successful creative director of an advertising agency. Her popularity among her colleagues and boss Subramaniam is legendary. She wins many awards, and is rewarded and acclaimed by her agency. Then she meets her friend Rohit (Salman Khan) from art school and has unprotected sex with him. Rohit leaves for the US where he works. A few months later, during a routine check-up while donating blood for her injured sister, she discovers that she is HIV positive.

Tamanna goes into a state of shock and confusion. She tells her sister about her HIV status. During this period, she is unable to work with her usual zeal and commitment. Her boss is shocked to know that she is HIV positive and dismisses her. The rest of the movie revolves around the legal implications of HIV-infected persons and their discrimination in the workplace.

Tarun (Abhishek Bachchan), a young lawyer, agrees to represent Tamanna in court against her employer. Though there is a national policy against discrimination of people with HIV/AIDS, the law itself is ambiguous. Subramaniam's lawyer Kalyani (Mita Vashisht) uses every trick in the book to prove that Tamanna's dismissal was not on the grounds that she was HIV positive. Kalyani's cross-examination of Tamanna about her sexual activity makes the audience squirm. Tamanna loses the case in the sessions court.

In the meantime, Rohit returns to India, terminally ill. An angry Tamanna confronts him only to learn that he was unaware of his HIV status during their encounter. She forgives him and cares for him till he dies. Tarun pursues the case in the High Court. Tamanna continues to work and wins many awards.

This film is well researched. The director has worked with experts from medical, legal and social agencies working on HIV/AIDS to produce a near flawless film. The messages are delivered with subtlety. Thus, viewers learn that unprotected sex causes the spread of HIV. Routine contact is shown to be safe; scenes of Tamanna's sister hugging her, and drinking water out of the same container, leave a lasting impression.

Tamanna brings out the helplessness and angst of a discriminated employee. The dichotomy between the policy and law on HIV in the workplace is highlighted in different stages of the trial. Dubious practices in the judicial system are authentically portrayed by Kalyani. Excellent performances by Shilpa Shetty, Abhishek Bachchan and Salman Khan make this movie emotionally charged.

There are, however, some drawbacks. Counselling and treatment are dealt with in a very sketchy manner. Revathy, who plays the doctor, could have spent time explaining and supporting Tamanna, but she seemed to be in a hurry to get back to directing. The role of NGOs, especially in counselling, is not shown.

Second, while the movie highlights some ways in which HIV affects society, Tamanna's only battle seems to be against her employer. Her social acceptance, as portrayed in this film, is too good to be true. Most people with HIV infection face considerable social stigma, but this subject has been handled very superficially. Tarun's long speech during the High Court proceedings is theatrical and out of character. Finally, the central issue of discrimination in the workplace could have been analysed in depth.

In conclusion, the making of this movie is a brave attempt to highlight some issues facing people with HIV. To film such a story without an eye on the box office is a tribute to the social commitment of the makers of this film.