

The shape of things to come

RICHARD A CASH

Elysium* Director: Neill Blomkamp. Producers: Bill Block, Simon Kinberg, Neill Blomkamp. 109 minutes. 2013.

Released in August 2013 and starring Matt Damon and Jodie Foster, "Elysium" is a science fiction film that explores political and social issues, with a special focus on healthcare, class, and justice.

The film is set in 2154, when the earth is even more overpopulated and heavily polluted. The rich and powerful have created Elysium, a space habitat that orbits earth. With the help of high-technology machines, all diseases can be cured, the ageing process can be reversed and even body parts can be recreated. However, this technology is available only to the elite citizens registered in Elysium and is not accessible to people on Earth.

The main character, Max (Matt Damon), is poisoned by a lethal dose of radiation and given just five days to live following an industrial accident at the Los Angeles factory where he works. His only chance of survival is to reach Elysium, get himself registered in the central computer and be treated. A friend has developed a computer programme that will allow everyone on Earth to become a citizen, but Max must first reach Elysium and

breach multiple layers of security to instal the programme. In his almost impossible attempt to reach Elysium, Max reaches out to his childhood friend Frey, who is now a nurse. Her daughter has leukaemia and she is also seeking treatment for her in Elysium.

There follows a rather convoluted plot, with a number of very violent confrontations. Whether Max reaches the computer core and what happens during the climax cannot be revealed here. But the film has taken up a key issue, that of the ownership of powerful healing technologies and their use for the public good or for private benefit.

The film clearly differentiates between those few who have access to the very best healthcare and the vast numbers who do not. The citizens of Earth are denied healthcare both for political and economic reasons, a situation not dissimilar to the citizens of many countries, including India. The sci-fi format allows these issues – access to healthcare, class, and justice – to be confronted directly and in a creative way. By not addressing the problems of any one country, the themes dealt with transcend specific boundaries and, in a sense, make them more accessible. The film is written and directed by Neill Blomkamp, who has been quoted as saying, "This isn't science fiction. This is today. This is now." The film is recommended to those who are interested in the inequities of access to healthcare and the underlying class issues that support inequitable systems, and those open to exploring these issues in a sci-fi format. That said, the film is complicated and has many moments of excessive and, it seems, unnecessary violence.

(*The review is based on a viewing of the film and excerpts from other movie reviews on the web)

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To cite: Cash RA. The shape of things to come. *Indian J Med Ethics*. 2015 Apr-Jun;12(2): 119.

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A story of real heroes

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Dr Prakash Baba Amte: a real hero, Producers: Golden Globe and Samruddhi Porey, Director: Samruddhi Porey. Marathi with English subtitles, 126 minutes, 2014.

The Marathi film, *Dr Prakash Baba Amte: a real hero* is the inspiring story of a doctor couple which has been working for the welfare of the tribal community in Hemalaksana, one of the most difficult tribal terrains in India, for decades and is still going strong. The two have worked tirelessly and without harbouring any expectations.

The film begins with the visit of a few international journalists to Hemalaksana. They have come to interview Dr Prakash Amte (Nana Patekar) and his wife Dr Mandakini Amte (Sonali Kulkarni), and to familiarise themselves with the Lok Biradari Project, one of the initiatives taken by the couple. This project

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To cite: Pandve HT. A story of real heroes. *Indian J Med Ethics*. 2015 Apr-Jun;12(2): 119-20.

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was inspired by Dr Prakash Amte's father, the late Baba Amte, the Gandhian who started "Anandwan", a home for leprosy patients, when the disease was seen as a curse.

Dr Prakash and Dr Mandakini had first come to Hemalakasa with some colleagues after completing their medical education a few decades earlier. The tribal community which had made this beautiful region its home was completely disconnected from other parts of the world. The biggest challenge before the Amte couple was to win the trust of the tribals, who were steeped in age-old traditions and superstitions. The traditional healers here were the "vaidus". In spite of their constant efforts to rid the tribals of their mistaken notions and superstitions and to explain illnesses to them in scientific terms, it took more than two years for the Amtes to get their first tribal patient. The couple started a sort of open hospital, in which tribal patients were admitted for the proper administration of medicines. This was because there had been a few instances of over-medication by the patients. The biggest hurdle in the way of effective interaction with the tribal community was the language. Therefore, the couple learned Madiya, the local tribal language. Dr Prakash, a general surgeon, started operating on patients for various illnesses and was supported by his wife, who was an anaesthetist. He had to acquire expertise in specialised procedures, such as caesarean section and cataract operations, as no specialist was willing to travel to this area and the tribals were unable to visit the

specialists. Today, the Lok Biradari Project hospital caters to thousands of patients. The film brings out Dr Prakash Amte's love of animals, including tigers, leopards, lions, bears and snakes. The Amte couple reared many such wild animals. The film also touches upon Dr Prakash Amte's contributions to the welfare of tribal communities in areas other than healthcare. For example, he was instrumental in ensuring that the benefits of various tribal welfare schemes of the government reached the real beneficiaries. He started a school for tribal children. The film shows how the Amtes were refused a US visa and were subsequently granted one when the consulate became aware of the impressive work being done by them. Dr Prakash Amte was awarded a Padma Shri, and both Dr Prakash and Dr Mandakini Amte are recipients of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award, besides many others.

The Amtes' dedication to working in one of the most daunting tribal areas of India is in stark contrast to the attitude of most doctors today. At the present time, doctors cannot even think of working in rural areas, despite the various incentives, as well as disincentives, announced by the government to encourage them to serve in these areas. This couple has been working for years, quietly and tirelessly, and now they have been joined by the next generation. To conclude, every doctor, not only in India but in the entire world, must watch this film. It is especially important for budding doctors, who need to know what a real doctor should be.

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