

Cinemedic: Portrayal of the Medical Profession in Bollywood

The incongruous portrayal of the medical profession in cinema and television serials has often been a topic of discussion in the medical community. Though the conversations are nearly always held in a lighter vein, the serious ramifications of these projections can never be over-emphasized. These depictions range from comic to ridiculous to, many a time, downright irresponsible.

It is not difficult to visualize what has now become the most commonplace of such scenes- A doctor palpates a young lady's pulse and goes on to right away declare that she is pregnant. What should have been an informed opinion confirmed with medical tests is simply put out as a playful, unscientific method of declaring a pregnancy.



Image

Source:
<https://www.chinesegenderchart.info/101-gender-predictors.php>

More of that. A C-grade film even goes to the extent of X-raying its leading lady to diagnose early pregnancy. Continuing in the same vein, every lady of reproductive age who vomits even once is instantly dubbed pregnant; and every

one-night stand seems to culminate in the stork coming home with a bundle of joy!



Image Source:
<https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/news/india/kolkata-doctor-nursing-home-owner-arrested-on-charges-of-baby-swapping/articleshow/64685820.cms>

Hospitals are shown as places where babies are routinely swapped – whatever happened to the concept called security at the institution. Nurses in a K Jo film are expected to be glamorous – powder and lipstick always in place, dressed in tight outfits, speak in a seductive voice in a delightfully fake accent.

What is particularly sad about the portrayal of nursing staff as mere showpieces is that the dedication and hard work are shown by many of them in real life ends up being completely ignored.

The sheer ignorance of the functioning of the medical profession and a hospital's best practices can be extended to Operation Theatre scenes. If the operating surgeon has a cap, mask and gown on, he does not wear gloves. If he puts on

gloves and other paraphernalia, the mask goes missing. It becomes laughable when all major surgeries are shown being conducted without the help of an anaesthetist. And there is, of course, the regular scene of the mandatory Boyle's trolley parked at the patient's head end.



Image Source:
<https://madhulikaliddle.com/2014/01/04/there-you-are-the-lost-and-found-trope-in-hindi-cinema/>

If there is one Bollywood movie which defies medical logic by many a billion-mile it ought to be *Amar Akbar Anthony*, the hugely popular blockbuster of the 1970s. There is a particular scene in the film in which three sons are shown donating blood to their mother, vein to vein, without any grouping, cross-matching or screening. While it is tempting to laugh away the scene, dismiss it as a director's creative expression, the portrayal does precious little to inform viewers of the on-ground facts from the world of medicine. Imagine the consequences of such an action in a Coronavirus setting and the enormous problems it would pose for medical professionals.

Such is the impact of Bollywood movies on the national psyche that there are patients who expect doctors to recreate that ridiculous scene.

“*Tu iss vansh ko beta nahi de saki, nikal ja mere ghar se*”, is one refrain we have heard repeatedly in films. This is one dialogue that has caused maximum damage to gender equality. Obviously, writers of such dialogue have not heard that the male chromosome decides the sex of the child. Dialogues such as these are not only irresponsible but unpardonable too as this leads to wrong information shaping public perceptions around the country.

Recently, a ‘*saas-bahu*’ serial on television went on shamelessly to advocate the cause of prenatal sex determination. This, in spite of the PCPNDT Act currently in force in the country, which bans this despicable practice.



Image Source:
<https://in.bookmyshow.com/entertainment/movies/hindi/west-greys-anatomy-bollywood-epic-brain-transplant-diya-aur-toofan/>

Miracles don't seem to cease taking place in films. The hero generally survives the barrage of bullets fired at him. Every vehicular accident is associated with either loss of memory or its restoration. The sight of a blind person is generally restored after he sings a soul-stirring bhajan or bangs his head on the steps of a temple. In a Mithun starrer, *Diya Aur Toofan*, a dead person was revived and brought to life by a

brilliant, groundbreaking 'brain transplant'. Another film, this time from the Telugu industry, has the hero save a dying woman by tossing a donated heart straight into an operation theatre!

Then we have the classic case of the famous Jaadu ki Jhappi from *Munnabhai MBBS* projected as a panacea for every medical ailment, including for the wheelchair-bound Anandbhai's serious-looking neurological disorder.

So far so good. The problem begins when patients start expecting these miracles from treating physicians. Cancer, unfortunately, is often projected as a terminal event. Death, of course, is more dramatic than mundane life and thus an essential ingredient of any cine-recipe. But instead of sending out negative signals, more encouraging values can be shown to give hope to the ones who are suffering. Moreover, it needs to be communicated that every malignancy is not lethal. In fact, many of them are now potentially controllable, if not curable.

To be fair to the Hindi film industry, there have been movies made on medical topics with positive messages too. *Dr Kotnis* still remains an *Amar Kahani* that portrayed the professional commitment of a young doctor. The 1971 produced Hindi flick, *Anand*, is yet another example of how a cancer patient was shown living his life to the fullest. *Taare Zameen Par* was a sensitive portrayal of a dyslexic child.

The anti-medico rhetoric slipped to a new low with *Gabbar is Back* that released in 2015. The movie had a sequence wherein doctors in a corporate hospital are shown indulging in fraudulent and unethical practices. More particularly, a dead patient is shown being put on a ventilator to inflate the hospital bill. Then there is Aamir Khan's show *Satyamev Jayate*, which showed healthcare providers in an extremely poor light. Social scientists have opined that such negative portrayals contribute significantly to the assault on

doctors.

Cinema is a powerful medium. Its reach, at least in India, spreads to every nook and cranny of the country. That it thrives on drama and exaggeration is also clearly understood and accepted. No one expects the film industry to make documentaries to spread health messages. Certainly, a filmmaker is not obliged to refer to medical books before writing a script. But, surely, they can act more responsibly and send out some 'healthy' signals.

Featured Image Source: Image Source:
<https://www.reckontalk.com/bollywood-doctors-dialogs-you-always-hear/>