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Laakhon mein ek: for the greater common good

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Laakhon mein ek, Season 2, Producer: Biswa Kalyan Rath, Director: Abhishek Sengupta, Hindi, 2019. 8 episodes. Amazon Prime Video.

Laakhon mein ek, Season 2, is an engaging drama series providing an authentic depiction of the rural posting of an upright young intern, Dr Shreya, at a primary health centre in a village called Sitlapur. The first season of this web series had followed the struggles of a young boy with artistic dreams forced to go to a coaching centre that prepares candidates for IIT entrance exams. The second season explores how Dr Shreya survives her rural tenure, made interesting as well as entertaining by a crisp script and commendable acting.

The show opens with a medical committee investigating a botched-up cataract surgical camp in a village. The committee is writing its final report and the story is played in flash-back. The real-life challenges faced by doctors in primary health centres are portrayed unapologetically, and with realism. Forcible admission against the doctor's advice, violence at the workplace, siphoning off of hospital supplies and medicines—only to make them available for cash—and the blind faith of the public in the local quack who prescribes all sorts of medication without any degree, are well known to doctors working at small centres.

The protagonist, Dr Shreya, superbly played by Shweta Tripathi, is given the task of organising a cataract camp in the village following the whim of the local politician hoping to gain political mileage in the coming elections. How she is compelled to organise the camp in a place where

basic facilities are lacking, funds scant, and infrastructure nonexistent, is the bitter reality and how the hard-pressed chief medical officer, support staff and fellow doctors try to help in achieving this task is vividly portrayed. The journey of a fresh-out-of-college intern completing a herculean task, amidst unsupportive colleagues and sceptical villagers, slowly winning them over, is heartening and may be educative for young doctors regarding the need for soft skills and empathy.

Social issues that need urgent solutions are explored in detail over the entire season like the angst of young doctors who do not wish to go to villages for want of basic amenities or due to the disturbance of their post-graduation preparation; the plight of CMOs having to beg or borrow to run the dispensaries; the nexus of local drug distributors and people with political clout making the most of tenders and contracts, siphoning off medicines, or in the worst scenario, disposing of expired drugs with new labels. All these bonafide problems demanding systemic reforms as well as a compassionate ear to the voices of care providers, are dealt with.

The reason why a respected family of the village has no faith in government healthcare services is traced sensitively to understand their despair regarding the system, which they fear will take more lives if they avail its services. This leaves them to depend on the local quack with little hope of a cure. Ultimately, the family confides in the doctor only to be cheated again by the system. The learning process is a harsh one for the protagonist, which makes the story more convincing.

The director has done a great job with well-researched content and a talented cast, avoiding unnecessary jargon and preaching. Intelligent viewers can derive their own meaning from the plot but the core message of ethics as the bedrock of good healthcare cannot be missed. The series suggests that while clinging to ethics is a tough job any day, selfless service together with ethical adherence is essential for the greater common good.

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To cite: Dharmshaktu GS. *Laakhon mein ek: for the greater common good*. *Indian J Med Ethics*. 2019 Jul-Sep;4(3) NS:249. DOI: 10.20529/IJME.2019.050

Manuscript Editor: Sanjay A Pai

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