

stigmatised as belonging to SCs/STs. The movie revolves round the rape and murder of two Dalit girls. However, is this any worse than the rape and murder of a Brahmin or Kshatriya girl? The difference here lies in the mind-set of the perpetrator who belongs to the same society that we live in. If the girls were raped because they were Dalits, then yes, it makes a difference. Another disturbing aspect depicted in this movie, which we also experience in our daily lives, is how religion and politics are so easily mixed with crime. Rapes are often politicised in our country to gain votes, and our elected leaders have been known to repeatedly make insensitive remarks over such issues (2). Further, this movie shows how the fourth estate also fails this vulnerable, oppressed, and stigmatised people with its biased reporting. In the movie, the media shows an act of befriending of the Dalits by the opposition leader without revealing the complete details of an act of discrimination.

Even if the culprits are caught, which rarely happens, it is a long and arduous wait for justice as in the Unnao rape case (3). Often, as in the Badaun case (4) and the innumerable cases of lynching and murder or molestation, justice is denied. The cases often languish for want of meticulous and honest investigation and reporting. Although several positive legislative reforms, such as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (5), and the "Guidelines and protocols: Medico-legal care for survivors/victims of sexual violence" (6) issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in March 2014, have come into being after the Nirbhaya case, the implementation gap still remains (7). This travesty of justice is fast becoming an everyday occurrence, and we, as a society, today need

to question whether we have become so immune to such incidents that they do not bother us anymore.

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The unethical doctor

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Kabir Singh, Producers: Cine1 Studios; T-Series, Director: Sandeep Reddy Vanga, Hindi, 2 hrs.52 mins, 2019.

The Hindi film *Kabir Singh* glamourises misogyny, toxic masculinity, male chauvinism and glorifies an unethical doctor who has no restraint and no control over himself. Written and directed by Sandeep Vanga, and a remake of his Telugu film

Arjun Reddy, it portrays an incorrect image of doctors and creates a false perception amongst the general public. The central character is not just a flawed doctor, but a seriously flawed human being.

In recent times when there have been several attacks on junior doctors, soft targets for the frustration at the failings of the healthcare system, the media should try to improve this scenario and not aggravate it. Within the first few minutes of the film, Kabir Singh beats up the referee of his football match, his opponents; and when condemned for his behaviour, merely says "I am not a rebel without a cause, sir". Now what this cause is which could possibly be the excuse for his violent behaviour is never clear. This is exactly what doctors are fighting against at the moment — violent venting of anger on hapless individuals — and here comes Kabir Singh whose behaviour is exactly what doctors are objecting to. He acts on impulse without thinking it through, and gets away with it.

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The film's portrayal of colleges and hostels is also very exaggerated, especially the ragging scene which takes place in the girls' hostel. In this scene, all the girls from the fresh batch are assembled in front of the girls from the senior batch and are asked to remove their clothes. Kabir Singh's colleagues rescue his love interest, but all the other girls are left there helpless. Ragging is banned in all medical colleges. It rarely happens in the majority of medical schools and this depiction will only add to the negative perceptions people have regarding doctors and medical colleges. Taking into consideration the impact the media has on people, some people might well believe this is what actually happens in most medical schools.

There is a code of conduct doctors follow. We cannot speak for all doctors, but we know most doctors try and abide by the rules. Doctors generally try to be models of good conduct and ethics; and on the other hand, the film presents a "hero" who is unethical and immoral. First, he tries to force himself on women, literally at knife-point. Second, he performs surgery under the influence of alcohol and drugs, putting the lives of patients in danger. Worse, when he is not able to complete the surgery himself, he gives instruction to the nurse in the operation theatre who then completes the surgery on his behalf! How can any of this be justified under any circumstances? Not only is the portrayal of doctors distorted, nurses and other staff far from reporting him, are shown, pouring him alcohol before surgery because apparently, he is a really nice person and an excellent surgeon! What adds to the problem is that Kabir Singh himself sees nothing wrong with his actions and justifies them, saying that he dictated each step

to the nurse and the patient is now doing fine. This is not how things go, but people from non-medical backgrounds might actually believe it is true.

The women in the movie are treated in a derogatory manner especially in the behaviour of Kabir Singh towards Preeti (the female protagonist). Despite being a 21st century girl, she takes commands from Kabir Singh as if he is entitled to issue them, which is wrong on so many levels. No reason, no amount of love, could possibly justify the ill-treatment of Preeti at the hands of Kabir Singh.

The film may be superficially entertaining, but as a doctor it was sad to see such a depiction of the profession. In India, films are a powerful medium which attract and influence a large section of the population. This power should be used wisely. People are influenced by the story, the characters, and some might even believe whatever is shown in the movies is correct. Coming at a time when doctors are being beaten up, abused by patients and their relatives, *Kabir Singh* only adds to the misconceptions people have about doctors. We are not asking the makers to sugar-coat the image of doctors but it is important to depict what is real and true. Glorification of a person who has anger issues, is immoral and unethical; and is disrespectful to people, especially women, despite being a doctor, is not what we need at the moment. Honest depictions of the profession, their struggle to become doctors, the hard work and the endless hours put into studying, the sacrifices made to be better doctors, will go a long way towards improving the poor image of doctors that people have started to have.

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