impediment to national policy development, also facilitates more points of access for new endeavours. Despite being snubbed by national organisations and some of the larger provinces, HRA Canada has been embraced more enthusiastically by smaller provinces. Reflecting the competition between nation-states, Canadian provinces too are increasingly competing amongst themselves to host clinical trials, and the ability to boast accredited research standards may be seen as a competitive advantage. Whether the shining promise of biopharmaceuticals as a pathway to economic development is well-considered remains to be seen; but there would be some comfort in knowing that this strategy cannot capitalise on the predation of the most vulnerable.

Note:

[1] In his memoir of the 1934 California gubernatorial campaign, Sinclair wrote that "It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it!" He was reflecting on why it was that mainstream commercial newspapers could not (or would not) grasp the systemic failures of a profit-only oriented growth strategy.

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MEDIA REVIEW

Homebound: Discrimination romanticised

SYLVIA KARPAGAM

***Homebound,* 2025, Producers: Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta, Somen Mishra, and Adar Poonawalla, Executive Producer: Martin Scorsese, (based on a New York Times article by Basharat Peer from 2020), Dharma Productions, Director: Neeraj Ghaywan, Hindi, 2 hours, Released September 26, 2025, Netflix release November 2025.**

The movie draws from the real-life story of Amrit Kumar and Mohammad Saiyub (named Chandan Kumar and Mohammed Shoaib Ali in the movie (portrayed by Vishal Jethwa and Ishaan Khatter, respectively). As migrant workers, they undertake the arduous journey from Surat to their village in eastern Uttar Pradesh, in May 2020, during the Covid-19 lockdown.

The movie portrays the aspirations of young people desperate to move beyond their day-to-day lived realities and the inevitable limitations that they are burdened with. The urgent need for employment opportunities for young people in the country, further aggravated by the lockdown, jumps out from the film. For the hundreds in the country who do get jobs, however exploitative, there are thousands who do not. In such situations, having friends who lift you up is one of the high points of the film. It also normalises male friendships, including touching and hugging. While women seem to be able to share their lives and have more emotional support, men are more often expected to be stoic and tough, with male friendships often tending towards toxic masculinity. This film shows vulnerability, sharing and caring between the young men who laugh, joke, lift each other up, carry each other (literally) and also express their deepest insecurities — sometimes with words, sometimes with silence, sometimes with rage. In India, frequent acts of mob violence, lynching and gang rapes are committed by groups of men enabling each other. This movie offers better examples of male bonding than aggression and toxicity.

There have been several reviews of the movie, mostly about how it visibilised the reality of caste and Islamophobia as it exists today. There are different kinds of movies on oppression and discrimination. Some place the viewer as an external, disengaged and distant observer who can shed tears about unfortunate acts of nature, humans or fate, but also go back and continue enabling or supporting the same practices of subjugation, discrimination, exploitation and aggression in their real lives.

Another kind of movie on oppression or discrimination hits the audience at the core of their existence, creating feelings of shame, guilt and horror because they, their own families and communities are presented as active participants and enablers of the problem. This kind of movie could lead to a visceral denial — that the movie is "exaggerated" and dramatises things that are not actually very serious or is something from the past. *Homebound* is a movie that evokes the first set of reactions. It can move to tears even those practising or enabling oppression and that is because the viewer is an observer, not really made aware that they are participants or enablers.

Some movies on caste have faced boycott and reprisals from oppressor caste groups because they show them in a bad light. This happened even with the biopic directed by Ananth Mahadevan on social reformers, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule [1], with objections raised by brahmin associations forcing the Central Board of Film Certification to clamp down on terminology that "portrayed brahmins in a negative light" and "promotes casteism". So, in a way, it is the community that benefits from casteism or communalism that also decides which movie or creative work is acceptable or not. Whether a director takes a hit or receives accolades also shows a mirror to whether the movie has superficially touched "emotions" or laid bare what one cannot bear to see about oneself. Movies which showcase victimhood are therefore more acceptable than those which throw the spotlight on the oppressors.

The viewer of this movie is called upon to sympathise with the oppressed, against overt acts of discrimination, while being allowed to ignore its structural nature. Those who are sensitive in private spaces, may not take a stance in a larger group or in the face of organisational or institutional barriers to equality, for fear of losing friendships or professional gains. Ordinary moments of potential camaraderie such as sharing a meal or watching a cricket match, become landmines that eventually close the door to some — *"I invited her but she didn't come"* can be loaded with overt and covert exclusions. These professional spaces then automatically have less representation but the responsibility is placed on those excluded from the space. In reality, caste or communalism do not occur as a series of incidents but as structural barriers to dignified living, debilitating because of the multiple layers in which they are manifested.

A question we need to ask is whether the actual migrant workers, dalit and Muslim communities can identify with these stories and characters. Can their own stories ever be romanticised or beautified? Can there be aesthetics or beauty in poverty or inequality? In reality, movies have to make sordid stories palatable. Can the indignity of migrating workers and the everyday humiliations faced by dalit and Muslim communities ever be portrayed by two cute, likeable young actors? That both protagonists are largely good natured and calm places the burden on them to be "good" no matter what the society is.

The film glosses over the fact that dalit and Muslim communities are being made to turn against each other, benefitting the actual oppressors politically, socially, economically and culturally. Muslim youth and their families have expressed shock at finding their sons or themselves being brutally assaulted and humiliated by people they thought were friends. The very idea of friendship between communities is being put to the test in real life.

The interaction of Chandan, the dalit young man with his love interest who is clearly of the "creamy layer" is simplistic. The heroine herself apparently faces no discrimination and seems to have benefitted from reservation almost to the point of being insensitive. This can be used to argue against reservation for more than one generation, even though in reality caste manifests itself in many ways, overt and covert. The few individuals and families from dalit communities who move up the ladder (the so called "creamy layer") are expected to give up resources and spaces, while those from the general category, with generations of privilege before them, face no such moral burden even though the data shows a disproportionate preponderance of privileged communities in most positions of power.

Casual, everyday Islamophobia has been captured well in *Homebound*. One of the two protagonists is able to walk out of a toxic work environment, but there are so many trapped in schools, colleges, workspaces, who cannot. These experiences can create an impotent rage which has not been adequately explored — how does it translate to who they associate with and relate to? Do they hide their identity or display it even more assertively? How do they respond towards authority? Can one eventually come out of these everyday humiliations blissfully unaffected and remain lovable and loving human beings? While the movie cannot be expected to cover everything, it is these experiences that lend authenticity to the narrative.

Bringing in the experience of Chandan's mother as a cook in a government school, as also his sister as an *anganwadi* helper, highlights the dreary occupations that people from marginalised communities are engaged in. While his sister cleaning toilets doesn't face any potential social boycotts, his mother's cooking food at a government school is viewed as an affront in spite of the principal himself challenging caste-based discrimination. It points to how the people in charge of institutions are not really in charge when social pressures subsume laws and principles.

It is important to draw from the film how an illness, the loss of a job, a pandemic, a lockdown, even the loss of friendship can push families and individuals over the edge. Although possibly unintended, the film shows how expensive private healthcare can be devastating to families who have no social safety net. If Shoaib's father had had access to good quality free healthcare, the expenditure would not have been so catastrophic. It is important for those watching the film to understand why free and quality healthcare should be non-negotiable in any country that aspires to be non-discriminatory and respectful of all human lives. A proud man who is forced to depend on his family because of his ill-health shows how far India is from ensuring dignity. An ambulance carrying a PPE kit-covered body home was the experience of thousands during the pandemic and lockdown. Often, discrimination extended even up to the burial ground, with bodies being directly burned or disposed of, often in undignified ways. Uttar Pradesh, incidentally, has been in the limelight for blatant caste and communal atrocities, particularly aggravated and normalised during Covid-19 [2]. One should also give some leeway to the film in

these times of boycotts and unreasonable and irrational censoring. A film that has to give credit to a government or a prime minister, even as it explores the consequences of a poorly managed pandemic, will inevitably be targeted by that very same government. In different times, perhaps the film could have been made closer to the truth.

While a movie that creates sympathy for victims of caste, religious and other oppressions has its place, the lens needs to shift towards those who perpetrate these human rights violations and force them to look inwards.

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BOOK REVIEW

Beyond pathologising: Youth, psychosis, and care

SHEMA ABRAHAM

Neely Laurenzo Myers, *Breaking Points: Youth Mental Health Crises and How We All Can Help*. University of California Press, 2024. Pages: 270, INR 3143 (paperback) ISBN: 9780520400610

Psychosis is often considered a break with reality. *In Breaking Points: Youth Mental Health Crises and How We All Can Help,* Neely Laurenzo Myers delves into the lives of young American adults undergoing first-time psychiatric hospitalisation for psychosis. The book is the result of over three years of fieldwork at Shady Elms, a psychiatric emergency hospital in North Texas. Through her ethnographic work, she portrays the rupture psychosis brings to the relational, moral, and social existence of these young adults, particularly the damage to their moral agency. Moral agency refers to the capacity and resources to aspire to a good life in accordance with one's moral compass. It involves autobiographical power, being perceived as a worthy person, and having supportive relationships. Young adults often refuse treatment because they fear it will lead to labelling and undermine their moral agency.

The book also addresses the intersectionality of mental health. Psychosis risk is unequally distributed across the US population, with Latin American and African American individuals being diagnosed at higher rates. Factors such as immigration, racism, discrimination, and social exclusion may contribute to increased psychosis risk. The author sheds light on how the American cultural ideal of independent adulthood aggravates mental distress among young adults. The pressure to "have it all" — to be healthy, attractive, successful, and autonomous — creates enormous strain. Psychosis disrupts the attainment of these ideals, further exacerbating shame and isolation.

The book consists of seven chapters. The first chapter, "Work hard, play hard", explains how cultural expectations regarding autonomy, achievement, and socialising can adversely affect vulnerable youth. The aphorism encourages young adults to manage their lives independently while balancing work and leisure, often without guidance from elders or clear rituals to mark adulthood. Hyper-individualism and substance-use norms create a precarious environment. Substance use often becomes a means of seeking belonging or coping with inner distress, while adverse childhood experiences and marginalisation further increase vulnerability.

The second chapter, "Into the Mythos", presents psychosis as a relational and moral crisis precipitated by sensory overload, social isolation, and the absence of shared narrative frameworks. Individuals actively create alternative meanings to preserve moral agency and belonging. However, in the absence of culturally sanctioned frameworks, such as community expectations or role models, meaning-making can become isolating and further erode social recognition. The author argues that psychosis