

THREE IDIOTS – “AAL IZZ WELL?” EXPOSING THE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM



Anyone in India will mention “Three Idiots” when asked what is the film which should represent their nation. Recognised as a modern Bollywood staple, it quickly rose as the No1 highest grossing film in India for 4 years. Many love the variety of genres and plots this movie offers: a comedy, romance, coming-of-age, and flashback film all rolled into one, yet still maintains many strong messages, challenging the Indian societal expectations surrounding their youth and their mental health.

Mental health has only recently come into mainstream attention, with it being something of a cheat-word for corporations to maintain the image that they care about their employees. Largely ignored or shunned in previous generations, the idea of emotional and psychological wellbeing has risen to the status of being just as important, if not integral, to someone’s physical health. More and more people are coming forward to ask for professional assistance for their mental health, and larger organisations have worked hard to impose measures for mental health to be taken more seriously. At least, that is the case in the West.

In many Asian cultures, including the ones in the Indian subcontinent, mental health is sidelined as a lesser priority in place of success in terms of material gain, monetary gain and heightening their social status. Reasons for this come from the very wide rich-poor gap in many of these countries, governments pushing their populace to further their emerging economies, and a fear of failure and shame, with still very clear memories, and realities for some, of the generations raised in poverty. Combining this thought, and their standards of family values and expectations, it is expected that India at the time had the highest student suicide rate in the world.

Actor Aamir Khan, who plays Rancho, is well known for taking part mainstream Bollywood movies which challenge societal expectations. His directorial debut, Taare Zameen Par released in 2007, critiques the education system in India and lack of understanding of neurodivergence. For Three Idiots, he leads a cast of actors who, aside

from himself and Kareena Kapoor, who plays Pia, were comparatively less known in the mainstream. However, the cast still does a monumental job portraying the characters, all with different motives, trying to survive a setting which is brutal, honest and uncompromising.

The scene many will look to as an example is “Aal Izz Well”. The song which expresses the everyday mundane struggles of university life but is brushed off by Rancho’s catchphrase “Aal Izz Well”, backed by an upbeat dance track. During this, Rancho repairs a student’s drone, after it being discarded by the professor, known as Virus, reasoning _____. Rancho fixes and pilots the drone to the student’s window to surprise him, only to find he has unalived himself, with the words “I QUIT” on the wall.

The scene is important for many reasons. Firstly, it is the first time the film has gotten “serious”, and the shock factor is immeasurable, especially those in the audience who were looking for the comedic or romantic aspect – it is clear this is nothing to laugh about. Second, it force-feeds the message to the audience. Up until this point, the audience clearly sees the interaction between Joy and Virus, how unnecessary strictly Virus stays to the rules, how little he takes into account the circumstances behind the student’s life and to an extent, how little he cares about his student’s wellbeing. This is a perfect representation of the struggles students suffer in their university and adult life, and the sacrifices they are forced to make on their life in exchange to being the model student. This reminder for many in the audience must hit home so hard.

Many in India might blame the rise of social media, COVID and the lack of infrastructure and resources available to help. But the fact is that “All Izz Well” encapsulates a bigger, more deep-rooted societal issue, not just limited in India by the way. Like Virus himself, his lack of understanding and care of his students allows this illness to spread, infecting the student’s minds with pressure and expectation, which worse and worse until it is too late. The movie’s recognition of this and its bravery in depicting it in such an explicit and brutal manner shows the degree of seriousness it can cause.