

MOVIE REVIEW

I Want to Talk by Shoojit Sircar

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Shoojit Sircar's *I Want to Talk* is a powerful exploration of mental health, personal loss, and the quiet resilience needed to move forward in the face of overwhelming adversity. The film, featuring Abhishek Bachchan in an unflinchingly raw performance, addresses complex psychological themes, including the emotional toll of a terminal illness, the breakdown of relationships, and the emotional weight carried by caretakers. Drawing from the tradition of parallel cinema, Sircar crafts a narrative that eschews commercial gloss in favor of an unvarnished portrayal of human struggles, offering an introspective lens into the fragility and strength of the human spirit. The director's approach is both subtle and poignant, inviting the audience to reflect deeply on life, grief, and survival. In particular, the film delves into suicidal ideation, portraying it with sensitivity and depth, shedding light on its prevalence among terminally ill patients, particularly in oncology, as supported by recent psychological research. With a runtime of 2 hours and 10 minutes, this film is not just a narrative of pain—it is a meditation on the difficulty and importance of continuing to move through life when it feels impossible.

The protagonist, played by Bachchan, is a man consumed by a medical condition that affects both his physical and mental well-being. His life has been upended—once a man who could conquer everything, he is now forced to confront the very essence of his existence. The film presents his dual existence: one as a highly driven professional, and the other as a man who is grappling with his vulnerability and fears. Early in the film, his denial of the gravity of his

illness is palpable—he clings to the norms, statistics, and debates that define his existence, perhaps to shield himself from the crushing reality. Yet, when his pain becomes undeniable and a second opinion confirms the severity of his condition, he spirals further, culminating in a breakdown. His divorce, a result of the emotional strain and inability to cope, leaves him facing the impact on his young daughter, compounding his isolation and grief.

In the heart of the story, the relationship between the father and his daughter becomes a focal point. Bachchan's portrayal highlights the deep emotional struggle as the father tries to connect with his daughter while enduring his own suffering. There is no instant resolution here, and the movie doesn't offer the kind of polished emotional arcs we often see in films. Instead, it delves into the messiness of life—capturing the frustration, bitterness, and resignation that can accompany an illness, and juxtaposes it with the brief, flickering moments of connection between a father and his child. These moments underscore the significance of small steps forward—one after another—even when the destination seems out of reach.

The film also sheds light on the experience of caretakers—those who, like the nurse who tends to the protagonist, are often overlooked in discussions of mental health and illness. The nurse's role is quietly monumental; she embodies the struggles faced by caretakers, from maintaining emotional distance to dealing with the complex psychological impact of caring for someone in terminal decline. Her own emotional burden becomes evident when she confronts the protagonist, slapping him as a means to snap him out of his self-destructive path. This interaction underscores a crucial psychological theme: the need for mutual empathy in the care process and the toll that caretakers experience.

In a poignant twist, the nurse's later suicide—sparked by her own loneliness and depression—reveals the deep interconnections between oncology and suicidal ideation. Research shows that cancer patients, particularly those with terminal conditions, are at heightened risk for depression and suicidal ideation (Alkechi et al., 2001). The nurse's tragic death mirrors the struggles of those she cares for, highlighting the emotional labor of caregiving and the profound isolation experienced by both patients and their caregivers. This narrative thread

underscores the complexities of mental health—especially in the context of terminal illness—where the psychological weight extends beyond the patient to those who serve them. As the protagonist reflects on her suicide, he recognizes the grim irony: "She was just like me."

Psychological research supports the depiction of how terminal illnesses can amplify feelings of hopelessness, with studies noting that depression and suicidal thoughts are prevalent among cancer patients (Sauer et al., 2022). In addition to this, the caretakers who experience chronic stress and emotional exhaustion are also at increased risk for depression (Schulz & Sherwood, 2008). The film's sensitive handling of these issues makes it a valuable text for understanding the emotional complexities that surround life-threatening illness and the people who endure its effects.

From a psychological perspective, the film encapsulates the nuances of grief—not just the grief of the patient, but that of the family members, friends, and caretakers who are affected by the illness. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, while often used to describe the patient's journey, are also applicable to those around them, particularly in terms of denial, anger, and depression. The protagonist's journey through these stages is mirrored in the experiences of those who love him, particularly his daughter and the nurse.

Additionally, the movie reflects the intersection of mental health, wellness, and death. It presents the father's journey not as a triumphant battle against the odds, but as a fragile, messy attempt to find meaning in the face of impending death. *I Want to Talk* does not suggest that healing is possible through sheer willpower or external advice. Instead, it simply asks for small steps—an acknowledgment of pain, an acceptance of vulnerability, and, crucially, a reminder to keep moving forward, even if that means stumbling along the way.

Bachchan's performance, aided by Sircar's direction, is a masterpiece of vulnerability. His portrayal of a man who has been cutthroat in his work and personal life, only to discover the importance of gratitude, is a quiet but powerful commentary on the emotional transformation that illness can catalyze. The protagonist's realization that he must confront his inner demons and express

gratitude to those around him—especially the nurse—offers a critical reflection on the human condition. His later interaction with her—where he expresses deep remorse—becomes a turning point, suggesting that even in the face of loss, connections can still be made.

For those working with individuals with special needs, this film serves as a poignant reminder of the parallels between physical and psychological disabilities. Just as children with special needs often face struggles that are invisible to the world, the protagonist's journey reveals how emotional pain can remain hidden beneath the surface, even as it profoundly impacts daily life. The protagonist's journey to rebuild relationships, particularly with his daughter, is akin to the constant, often invisible struggles faced by individuals with disabilities, whose progress is often measured by society's standards, rather than their own.

In conclusion, *I Want to Talk* is a critical psychological exploration of grief, mental health, and resilience. It offers no easy solutions but instead presents a raw, unvarnished portrayal of how people cope with loss and illness. By examining the emotional struggles of both the patient and the caregiver, Sircar's film provides a crucial commentary on the often-overlooked psychological toll of terminal illness, making it a must-watch for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of mental health in the context of life-threatening conditions.

References:

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