

PRESS KIT

68 pages

Marked by pain, bound by hope

For the first time, a film that strings together stories of five HIV positive persons from different high risk groups – gay, transgender, sex worker and drug user. Based on reflections of true-life incidents and characters, it is a film that has originated from within these communities with active participation of NGOs working with these marginalized populations. The film deals with issues that need to be discussed but have not found space in the society as discussing them in the society is still taboo.

The film mainly focuses on five HIV positive persons whose lives change dramatically when they come to know of their status. These stories of pain are bound within the diary of an HIV/AIDS counsellor... in 68 pages of her diary... pages that record the lives of her counselees, their pain and their joy, their despair and their hopes, their tears and their laughter.

Their stories have the capacity to touch, heal and change lives... lives of those who are HIV positive but do not lose hope. 68 PAGES is a tribute to the human spirit of optimism and survival.

This 90-minute film has been produced by The Humsafar Trust in association with Solaris Pictures with the support of DFID (UK). Directed by Sridhar Rangayan, the cast includes Mouli Ganguly, Joy Sengupta, Zafar Karachiwala, Jayati Bhatia, Uday Sonawane and Abhay Kulkarni with music by Xen@BOB.

PLOT

68 PAGES is the story of Mansi, a counsellor whose ethics demand that she has to maintain confidentiality of her counselees. She has to be objective in understanding their problems and give them options that would help them come to terms with their status. She cannot get emotional about any person she is counselling.

But is it possible for a sensitive young woman to remain unaffected by the suffering that she witnesses around her? Mansi is after all human. She gives vent to true feelings by sharing it with her diary. Her pain and anguish are reflected only on the pages of her diary. There are some counselees whom she cannot leave behind in the counselling room. She carries their stories home and they become part of her diary.

It is through the pages of Mansi's diary that we see the stories of Paayal, Kiran, Nishit and Umrao, marginalised by the society, stigmatized for being themselves and not being able to find a place in the mainstream society. The film makes an effort to address issues of minority communities and their status as HIV positive people.

CHARACTERS

Mansi (played by Mouli Ganguly) is a young HIV/AIDS counsellor who believes in keeping her personal and professional lives apart. Trying to get over a broken love affair, she immerses herself in her career. A post-graduate in psychology, she joins a gay community centre as a counsellor where her clients include gay and transgendered men. She also comes in touch with sex workers and IDU users as part of her work at a leading psychiatrist's clinic and visits to the local municipal hospital.

There are some people whom she meets and counsels but 'cannot leave them behind' in the counselling room. Their experiences follow her home and become part of her diary. Mansi reflects on their lives and comments on issues that are rarely addressed in society. Her work becomes a challenge and little does she realise that some day her chosen path would bring her to the crossroads of life when she would only have questions and no answers.

Her ex-lover, now married, comes back into her life to torment her even as she is getting ready to go to Columbia University for higher studies. Can she get over him? Will she have the courage to move away from her past?

Paayal (played by Jayati Bhatia) is a sex worker in the red-light area of Mumbai. Born in the lanes of Kamathipura, sex work is all she knows. She is now 35 and has to face competition from a younger sex worker, Neelu. Her life revolves around Lalli, her eight-year-old daughter whom she wants to educate and give a bright future. Her anchor in life is Shetty, who is not just her regular customer but also her friend and in many ways she looks at him as her support system. Paayal's life changes dramatically when she tests HIV positive. How does Shetty react when he comes to know of her HIV status? What happens to her dreams of educating Lalli and see her grow up? Will she live to see her dream come true? The heart-rending story of Paayal reveals an unseen aspect of the life of a sex worker.

Kiran (played by Joy Sengupta) is a gay man who works in the same NGO where Mansi is a counsellor and is her best friend. Kiran is confident, cheerful and full of life. He shares a wonderfully cozy relationship with Mohit, his lover of four years. They have promised to be faithful and loyal to each other. Their mutual affection revives Mansi's faith in love and she starts redefining her concepts of love, loyalty and relationship. Kiran helps her come to terms with her past relationship. Kiran trusts Mohit and their love beyond all reasonable limits. It's a risk Kiran took but was it worth taking the risk ?

Nishit (played by Zafar Karachiwala) is an ambitious youngster who has made it big early in life. He is 27 and has everything. His life is an unending round of parties with friends and his girlfriend Neha. He is slowly getting addicted to drugs and the use of intravenous drugs infects him with HIV. The truth hurts. He has to face discrimination at the workplace, he has his education loans to repay and he cannot reveal the truth to Neha for fear of rejection. His journey from denial to acceptance, from fear to hope and final determination that life does not stop with becoming HIV positive but can mark a new beginning in life – it's a story of courage.

Umrao / Umesh (played by debutante Uday Sonawane) is a young 24-year-old boy who believes that he is a woman trapped in a male body. He supports a family of four people including his mother, his alcoholic brother and a younger sister who is yet to finish her education. Umesh dances to Bollywood numbers at Shetty's bar as 'Umrao'. The ban on dance bars brings his life crumbling down and he is forced into prostitution at truck terminals in Mumbai. Though aware of the fact that not using a 'chocolate' (condom) puts him at risk of being infected with HIV, his family conditions force him to do as the customer says and he turns HIV positive. Is there a life ahead for Umesh? Where does he go and what does he do? Hope does he cope with the double stigma – of being a transgendered person and a HIV+ person? This forms the crux of his story in the film.

Nathu (played by Abhay Kulkarni) He is a man who has no voice. He is the nameless person whom Mansi meets every day on the street outside her house. He cleans the streets and that's his only identity. Yet when he does not show up Mansi notices his absence. Will Mansi ever care for a moment to stop and ask his name? Does he need support? Will he get care and support? Or will he just die a nameless death? Will he ever become part of Mansi's diary?

CREDITS

Cast:

Mouli Ganguly, Joy Sengupta, Jayati Bhatia, Zafar Karachiwala, Abhay Kulkarni, Newcomer Uday Sonawane, Sherrin Verghese, Mangal Kenkre, Ajay Rohilla, Rupal Patel, Dilnaz Irani, Bakul Thacker, Pratik Gandhi and Ikhlq Khan.

Cinematography:

Shubranshu Das

Editing:

Preveen Angre

Song:

Xen@BOB (earlier Band of Boys)

Script:

Vivek Anand, Sridhar Rangayan

Executive Producer:

Vivek Anand

Directed by:

Sridhar Rangayan

Produced by:

The Humsafar Trust in association with Solaris Pictures

PROFILES

THE HUMSAFAR TRUST: The Humsafar Trust is a male sexual health agency that has been working with marginalised communities since 1994. It provides diagnostic, counselling and treatment facilities to HIV positive and negative people from the gay and transgender communities. Humsafar was set up by the leading gay activist Ashok Row Kavi along with two other self-identified gay men who desired to reach out to the gay population in the Mumbai Metro and surrounding areas. After much networking and advocacy with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation for over a year and a half, it became the first openly gay community based organisation to be allotted space.

Humsafar is based out of a municipal building in Vakola in Santacruz, Mumbai, where it runs a drop-in centre, a voluntary confidential counselling and testing centre (VCCTC) and clinic, and a reference library. Humsafar runs several projects in and around Greater Mumbai and has mid-wifed the birth of several gay organisations around the country. Today, it is also spearheading a country-wide network of these organizations.

SRIDHAR RANGAYAN: A graduate of IIT-Mumbai, he has directed and scripted several award winning films – from the celebrated *Gulabi Aaina*, a film on Indian transsexuals which won Best Jury Award at Fire Island Film Festival, USA and the recently released controversial English gay feature - *Yours Emotionally!*, an intoxicating queer journey through India. Dealing with issues that have not been addressed before, Rangayan has managed to combine advocacy and entertainment in his films. He runs Solaris Pictures in partnership with Saagar Gupta, who has written dialogues for several films and TV serials.

XEN@BOB AND THE TITLE SONG: Xen@BOB is the coming together of two music groups Nexus and Band of Boys that makes intelligent music. Xen@BOB has composed the original theme song for 68 Pages, “Yaadon ki raah par khushiyon ki chhaon hai”. The song has lyrics written by Saagar Gupta and is sung by Band of Boys alongwith television actress Narayani Shastri, who is making her singing debut.

DFID: The Department for International Development (DFID) is the British government department responsible for Britain’s contribution towards international efforts to eliminate poverty. DFID India has a strategic National programme and works in partnership with the Government of India to achieve its national development targets and its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals. (This film is supported by DFID)

LINKS

www.dfid.gov.uk

www.humsafar.org

www.solarispictures.com