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SXSW Film review: 'Loev' succeeds

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Sahil and Jai finally find a quiet moment at the end of their hike in the Western Ghats | Credit: Oankar Chavan

In India, same-sex relationships are not only taboo, but also illegal. Just this past week, politicians there voted against decriminalizing gay sex. While the laws are not often enforced, LGBT people in India can risk life in prison if they're caught engaging in sexual activity.

This makes deciding to make a film about gay men in the country a defiant act. With his debut feature "Loev," director Sudhanshu Saria had to shoot the film in absolute secrecy, without permits and traditional financing.

Fittingly, we begin in almost absolute darkness. Sahil (Dhruv Ganesh) is preparing for a weekend getaway, but his immature boyfriend Alex (Siddharth Menon) has forgotten to pay their electric bill, and their electricity has been shut off.

Shiv Pandit plays Jai, who returns home to Mumbai on a business trip after relocating to Manhattan. He uses his brief trip to reconnect with Sahil, who was one of his best friends. It's clear that at some point in their past, they've been more than friends and that they still care a lot for each other, but there are a lot of mixed messages on their weekend journey.

For starters, Jai appears more devoted to his work than to Sahil. They struggle to get on the same page, and it

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doesn't help that they show up at their hotel and two single beds have been moved into the room because the reservation was for two men. They cannot show much affection for each other even if they want to when they're out in public. These things keep physically pushing them apart even though their hearts are clearly aligned.

In their complicated relationship, they know how to make each other laugh, but also how to push each other's buttons. A situation at Jai's important business meeting changes the entire tone of the trip, and things happen that cannot be undone. It's a risky move for a movie that could otherwise be a pleasant little gay drama. For some, it may be even more successful of a story because of this added realism — it is not a storybook romance.

"Loev" succeeds because of its fine actors and the beautiful scenery. Shot in just 16 days, it's a small miracle that this film even exists to tell a story that may never even be seen in its home country. An even sadder post-script: lead actor Dhruv Ganesh passed away from tuberculous while the film was in post-production. His first lead role was, unfortunately, his last.

Other screenings: 7:30 p.m. Monday, Alamo South Lamar; 1:30 p.m. Friday, Alamo Ritz

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