

Woman as Hero

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Abstract:

“Dress in sari, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,

Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. oh,

Belong, cried the categorizers.”

-An Introduction

Kamala Das.

Women, throughout the history of the world has been experimented as wife, cook and are subjected to humanistic violence. Women are heroes, but the world is too contemptuous to concur to this idea. The philosophy that guards the notion that women are or should be par with men has been highly questionable since the beginning of time. Starting from the myth of Adam and Eve where modern critics classify Eve as the temptress and the reason for the fall of man however it can also be argued that Eve gave birth to God’s most intelligent creation.

Introduction

We live in the 21st century and the phrase ‘the future is here’ is apt. However, women are still victims to discrimination. The most dangerous and powerful tool that has emerged is media and instead of it being a boon to the downtrodden women, it often attempts to confine them in the four walls of the patriarchal society. However the recent revolutions in the media has been striving to break the boundaries of women and representing women as the real heroes they are. This paper will lay down a few ideas and thoughts that will present a debate on Women as heroes in close reference to the Movie “Rudali” directed by KalpanaLajmi. It’s

based on a novel by Mahashweta Devi, which gave a voice to the subaltern missing narratives. This paper will lay down ideas to propagate on women being heroes, not the cape wearing with supernatural powers but one who overcomes the challenges put forth by society and still rise the next morning without a hint of resentment. It will also question the notion of who is a true hero, when the 21st century is built on fantasies and misconceptions.

You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes,

You may kill me with your hatefulness,

But still, like air, I'll still rise.

Still I rise

Maya Angelou

RUDAALI

Rudaali(1993),which was directed by KalpanaLajmi is based on a novel written by Mahasweta Devi,a Bengali writer. This movie,starring Dimple Kapadia as Shanichari,the leading character of the film,Raj Babbar,Rakheecompletes the film. As the title says, the film is about a rudaali, meaning a professional mourner,woman who belonged to a lower caste family and deals with the metamorphosis of the same to a bold and strong women.

The story happens in a small village in Rajasthan where Shanichari grew up. She got the name as she was born on Saturday, which was considered to be an inauspicious day and the people of her village looked on her as ill fated,as she was born on the same day.She had to face many abandonments from her dear ones,like her own mother and father from her childhood days itself. When she grew up, she married Ganju and had a son, whom she named Budhua. They were living in a small hut with her ailing mother-in-law. Lakshman Singh,

who was the son of the local landlord, Ram Avatar Singh, wanted Sanichari to be his mistress, which she didn't want to, as she couldn't abandon her husband and child. Soon her mother in law passes away, but she was unable to weep as she had to do the death rituals in the absence of her husband. Ganju gets killed years later after drinking holy water from a pilgrim centre. Still she was unable to weep. Then her son Budhua gets married to Mungri, who later on becomes a prostitute and leaves her child after Budhua dies. She was unable to weep then also.

It is then a woman named Bhikni enters Sanichari's life. She was a Rudaali by profession. She wanted Sanichari to become a Rudaali, on seeing her condition. Sanichari was running out of money as she had to look after her grandson now. But Sanichari's eyes were always dry, she couldn't even weep or cry for her dear one's death, then how was she going to be a Rudaali where she wanted to cry for somebody else's death? She then comes to know that Ram Avatar Singh was dead and she was called to be a Rudaali for his funeral. Bhikni went to some other village that day so she went to attend the funeral, not as a Rudaali, as she was sure that she couldn't shed tears on his death. That was a life changing day for her, when she came to know that Bhikni was her own mother, who abandoned her and left with a rich man when she was a kid, and that she was no more. That brought real tears to her eyes and she used that pain and tears to become a Rudaali. Finally she became a Rudaali venting out her frustration and anger through howls and cries.

The movie is quite different from the novel where Bhikni is just a childhood friend of Sanichari. Bhikni was the one who gave a moral support for her and was the one who was with her when everyone left her. And in the novel, her husband Ganju is an abusive person but he is not in the film.

HOW OLD ARE YOU

How Old Are You is a Malayalam film directed by Rosshan Andrews, starring Manju Warrier, Kunchakoban, and Kaniha in the lead role. It's a story about a 36 year Nirupama Rajeev (Manju Warrier) a UD clerk in Revenue Department. Here in the film, she rediscovers her lost personality of herself and the society by vanquishing strong odds from a patriarchal society.

Rajeev Narayanan (Kunjackoban) is Nirupama's husband who works at a radio company and he wants to migrate to England for a better life. She could not accompany him and her daughter as most of the companies in Ireland rejected her job applications. She was

leading a normal life and there was nothing interesting about her life but she wanted a change. Her daughter once interviewed the President of India with an interesting question which was noted by the President. When she was asked about the inspiration behind the question, she said that it was her mother (Nirupama) who gave the idea for the question she asked to the President. Nirupama then gets an invitation from the President to have a conversation with him. But when she came in front of him, she faints and their meeting turned out to be a disaster. Everyone came to know about the issue and she became a laughing stock on media. She also had to undergo criticisms from her family members also, including her husband and daughter. After this scene, her husband and daughter move to Ireland leaving her alone.

Nirupama then happens to meet one of her old classmate Susan David (Kaniha) who was then a successful business woman. While on their conversation, Susan reminds her of the woman she used to be before, when they were in the college and tried to inspire her by rediscovering her younger self. She then explains to the social media about the things that happened when she met the President and clears their misunderstandings. She couldn't rise up to her daughter's expectations. Her daughter was troubling her so much with the same. She was also feeling embarrassed of her husband being mistaken for her younger brother troubles her more. One day Nirupama goes to meet an old woman on knowing that she was sick. She meets her everyday in the bus but they both didn't know their names or anything. She visits her with the vegetables she grew on her terrace. The old woman thanks her for spending time with her and for reminding her that she has someone in this world to care for her as she had no one in her life. Her vegetables were so pure that it gained so much popularity among the neighbors of the old woman and they were even asked for a marriage function. In order to supply the vegetables for the function, she encourages all her neighbors to cultivate vegetables on their roof tops and it turns out to be a huge success. She was even invited by Susan (her friend) to present a seminar on biofarming, with many important people as the audience. Her topic influenced all of them and was given the duty to make it a reality. Finally she succeeded in that and became one of the most influential persons of the society. The President of India again invited her after this and it became a successful one.

The transformation of Nirupama from an ordinary depressed woman to an inspiring and steady lady is what we can see in the film

THIRA

Thira, a film by the young director VineethSreenivasan starring Shobhana and DhyanSreenivasan is about a youth and a middle aged woman who set out in tracking their dear ones who were kidnapped by the human trafficking gang and end up battling a much deeper issue.

Rohini Pranab(Shobhana), a cardiac surgeon, is a determined woman who can be seen very wisely and bravely dealing with the kidnap of her dear ones, her personal loss, with a resolution to take offence and violence. She gives shelter to poor girls. Those girls were kidnapped by a human trafficking gang who also kidnaps Naveen's (Dhyan) sister, right in front of his eyes. Both of them, Rohini and Naveen, along with their friends are doing every possible things to track those kidnappers and faces many hardships in between. They underwent many troubles and finally reaches the secret place where those kidnapped girls are kept. They then understood their real motive behind their trafficking. They were selling girls to many people, including many important ones. Their combined effort, Rohini's wise advice and Naveen's action finally released those girls.

Extra ordinary in the ordinary

Women don't need super powers to be heroes, or a cape or weapons. She can be one that stays indoors, cooks, cleans and can still emerge to be an extraordinary woman, in the most ordinary way. Society are so hung up on gender, that it cannot alter its understanding when it comes to the roles played by women.

Gender describes the socially constructed roles, activities and responsibilities assigned to women and men in a given culture, location or time. It differs from sex which describes biological and genetic differences between men and women. Gender is learned and changes over time. Gender functions at the household, community and national levels and thus is embedded in a society's, cultural, economic and political systems. These systems are based within a given legal frame work which includes not only laws and regulations but the institutions which enforce or fail to enforce them. However, Gender identities influence how women and men perceive themselves think and behave and Gender differences interact with other inequalities such as race, age, social class and ethnicity. Understanding gender systems, benefits in examining the relationships between men and women as well as their respective roles.

The understanding of female, feminine and feminist has been brought forward by both Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi. Female is a term used for a human that possess the biological sex

characteristic, feminine is used for one that portray characters that are recognise by society as female, and feminist is but a political label indicating support for the aims of the new movements which emerged in the late 1960s.

In reference to the movies that we would like to discuss in this paper, it should be understood that “Woman as heroes” is not only confined to the west ideology when it comes to the term, Indian directors, like Kalpani Lajmi, Rosshan Andrews and Vineeth Sreenivasan, who broke the conventional idea of a hero, making a woman not something she isn’t, but as simple as humanistic as she is, yet again a hero in the eyes of the audience. They portrayed woman as strugglers of everyday life that tries not to out win men but as one’s who fights for their own life. They are not supernatural beings, or remarkable idols that everyone would like to follow however they are representing as mere subjects of life.

Rudali, by Kalpani Lajmi is a beautiful depiction of a woman, who belongs to the lower caste in society, exploited brutally by the superiors of the community both political and religion but still work for herself, and her survival, marking no matter what or who you are, life is still the greatest blessing one can achieve. Sanichari, the protagonist of the movie, loses everything that is dear to her, yet, she moves on with her life and still fights to survive. She first loses her mother-in-law who believes she is ill-fated, followed by her husband, her son Budhua, adding more pain to the misery is her daughter-in-law eloping off, and her grandson leaving with the circus troop. All this would have been thought to be exaggerated in the life of a poor woman, yet it doesn’t stop the audience from understanding the strength that is in build in Sanichari. The movie based on the novel by Mahashweta Devi, and both the book and the movie though there’s a slight alteration tries to depict that a woman can be a hero in herself, without showing the world what she is capable of. Surviving is more than enough. The movie also portrayed the ability a woman has, and Bhikini represents the rejuvenating of life when all is lost, there’s still hope around the corner. Real heroes don’t wear a cape.

Rosshan Andrews on the other hand has quite a different notion on the take of ‘women as heroes’. Along the lines of Rudali itself when in terms of self-sufficiency and self-employment, “How old are you?” presents the plight of a 21st century, 36 year old Nirupama Rajeev, who has a husband who dreams to work in Ireland, but fate is not kind enough for Nirupama when none of the companies accepted her. Another break down and sacrifice to be taken heavily. The other important event is her meeting with President of India, where she faints creating an embarrassing scene for the daughter and husband accompanied by the

family members. She becomes the laughing stock of Social media, and is in deep agony because of that. The bottomless pit of agony hits rock bottom when she had to bid adieu to her daughter and husband who left without any consideration to her existence. Susan David, her old friend, shed light on her, reminiscing her old youth and encouraging her to travel the same path again. Nirupama finds solace in her vegetable garden at her roof top, and gain publicity with her small act of kindness towards an old lady she barely know. And from this small act of valour she gained back what is rightfully hers, her existence in society. She again meets the President, attain a good job and from there life when up hill. Rosshan used such a simple technique to pedestalize woman with such a simple task at hand. Nirupama's vegetables has no special ingredient or magical potions that made it to its fame, but just a basic work taken with such utmost care and passion. Real heroes don't need superpowers.

Vineeth Sreenivasan, in terms of 'Woman as heroes' took a stand on woman trafficking, giving voice to a cardiac surgeon and social worker and also the responsibility to track kidnappers and free the victims. Rohini Pranab, the protagonist of "Thira" is also but an ordinary woman, which saves life in the medical field, who took a step forward and saved the victims that have been trafficked. She is joined by Naveen, who witnessed his own sister being kidnapped. What started as just a onetime save, the duo put the burden on their shoulder to dig deep into the world of trafficking.

Conclusion

These woman stands out to be the 'extra ordinary in an ordinary way'. Their contribution to the society is not as exemplary, but in their small acts they emerge as heroes. Sanichari, a hero because when life was cruel to her and took everything that is dear away from her; she fought, and still struggle to survive without resentment. Nirupama, a clown for many, an embarrassment to her family, inadequate. When she's left with no hope, her passion for the vegetable garden brought her fame and recognition. Rohini, on the other hand, fought not for herself, but against the exploitation against one of her own. Three different woman, three different stories, three different exploitation.

'Women as heroes' is a misconceived notion in the society, which believes it encompasses costumes, mythical creature or magical and supernatural. Women fighters are seen throughout cinema, however it rare to find one that fights herself, that fights to live, and fights for existence. Three prominent figures that have been mentioned in this paper are

Sanichari, from the movie Rudali, Nirupama, from the movie How old are you and Rohini, from the movie Thira. The theme is extra ordinary in the most ordinary.