



Rediscovering Self: A study of the character Nirupama Rajeev in the Malayalam Movie “How Old Are You”

Media

Jisha K

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute of Home Science and Higher Education, Coimbatore

ABSTRACT

The study tries to explore the transformation of the character *Nirupama Rajeev* from a dull and depressed 36 year old working woman to a vibrant, enthusiastic and focused person in the Malayalam Movie *How Old are You*. A short term Content analysis study is done to find out the portrayal of the character Nirupama Rajeev. The movie strongly portrays the inability of a woman to rise up to the daughter's and husband's expectations. After experiencing few situations, she transforms herself in to a powerful, more energetic character and rediscovers her true self. The character steps out and rise from the conventions and pursue her aspirations. The concept of biofarming is effectively promoted in the movie. The movie revolves around the theme that age is just a number and nobody is too late or old to chase their dreams. It shows a woman's quest to find out her long buried identity.

KEYWORDS:

Woman empowerment, Stereotypism, real identity

Introduction:

With time everything goes through a changing period. The same is applicable when it comes to woman portrayal in movies today. Gone are the days where women are seen as characters who sacrifices everything, their ambitions, their wishes, and to the core their true/inner self for the betterment of their family. Now movies are dealing with changes in portraying women characters. The Malayalam movie “*How Old are You*” (2014) directed by Rosshan Andrews is a such worth analyzing movie where the protagonist Nirupama Rajeev, played by Malayalam actress Manju Warriar is seen as a character undergoing transformation from a perfect working woman who sacrifices all her desires, ambitions and wishes for the betterment of her family to a strong powerful and determined woman who has discovered her true self thereby achieving her aspirations.

Methodology of the study

The study is qualitative in nature. A short term Content analysis study is done to find out the portrayal of the character Nirupama Rajeev in the movie *How Old Are You*. Usually movies are considered as a reflection of society. Still there is confusion in understanding whether movies are a reflection of society or society is the reflection of portrayal in movies.

Movie content analysis helps us to define and understand about movies by evaluating movies, about its characters, plot, thoughts and rating it in all respect. Berger (1991) says: “Content analysis ... is a research technique that is based on measuring the amount of something (violence, negative portrayals of women, or whatever) in a representative sampling of some mass-mediated popular form of art” (p. 25). In this study, the character Nirupama Rajeev is taken as a unit of analysis.

Synopsis of the movie How Old are You:

The movie revolves around the character Nirupama Rajeev. In the beginning of the movie, she is portrayed as a woman who strives her best to meet her husband's and daughter's expectations. She is an ideal wife, but depressed and works as a UD clerk in revenue department. Nothing interests her in life. Neither the job nor the space at home. She works without any interest in job. On the other side, we can see an ambitious husband, Rajeev, played by Kunchacko Boban, who achieves his dream without considering his wife and her identity. He is depicted as a chauvinist husband. Nirupama once helps her daughter to prepare a question to be asked during a students interaction with The President of India. This question changes the life of Nirupama. She gets an invitation from the President of India to have a conversation. Nirupama who is not bold enough faints when she meets the President. This is taken by social media as a laughing stock and she is being humiliated by both the family and the professional side. Her husband Rajeev migrates to Ireland with their daughter leaving behind Nirupama. During this time, she coincidentally meets her college mate Susan David, who is a successful business woman, played by Kanika.. It's the character Susan who reminds her of the woman she used to be in college days and inspires her to rediscover her real self. From this onwards, Nirupama Rajeev, starts getting transformed.

A Spark for transformation

Nirupama Rajeev has a habit of having vegetable garden at roof top. These vegetables are highly organic. She gets a wedding order to provide them with the organic vegetables. This creates a spark for the character to do something out of her passion and thereby pursue her dreams. She somehow convinces few more people to cultivate the vegetables and this becomes a successful project for her. Her concept of biofarming gets appreciated even by the government. She slowly gets all boldness to face the life with her true identity and becomes successful in that. Again she gets a chance to meet the President and then she meets the President with full confidence and boldness.

Analysis of the Character Nirupama Rajeev: From normal woman to superwoman

Nirupama Rajeev is a character which is taken for granted by other characters both in personal and professional front in the beginning of the movie. Her concerns are her age, her image, (that is, her husband being mistaken by others as her brother) her inability to rise up to her daughter's expectations etc. Many women today are having such concerns. The character Nirupama is a reflection of today's women.

In the personal front, Nirupama Rajeev is a failure. We can see a personal crisis of the character. Through her friend, Susan David, we get the yester life of Nirupama Rajeev, where she was a revolutionary, very much active, vibrant, and ambitious. Due to personal problems and post marriage, Nirupama underwent a personal crisis. Her life is devoted to her family and she has forgotten to live for herself. She keeps aside all her dreams, ambitions and aspirations for the sake of her family. From this stereotypic woman, she gets transformed to a super woman who is more focused about her dreams. It is the character of Susan David who encourages her to find out her long buried identity. In every woman's life, there will be such inspiration in the form of either people or situations. The positive approach they take determines their success.

From the second half of the movie, she finds her inner self and become more focused about what she wants to achieve in life. The organic farming concept attracts her attention and she takes it as a profession thereby motivating others to do the same. Even in personal front, she moulds herself in such a way that at times she has said NO to her husband. There is a scene in the movie where Rajeev asks Nirupama to come to Ireland as he is unable to take care of their daughter and he can not afford a servant. She makes her husband understands that she is also a person who has an identity which has to be considered.

Power of a woman: From with in

The movie very well conveys the message that if a woman wants to get empowered, then it is none other than their self who can motivate, enthuse and thereby empower them. An inner power should be there to motivate them through out. External factors to an extent only can help them to get empowered. If a woman understands this, then they can pursue their dreams at the same time perform their family responsibilities. The movie has portrayed how well a woman can balance their dreams and the responsibilities at family.

Who puts the expiry date on a woman's dream? is the message given through the movie. From the portrayal we could see that it is none other than the woman herself who puts the expiry date for her dreams. Previously the similar idea was portrayed through the movie English Vinglish, where one can see the character played by Sreedevi getting transformed from a shy to a more bold and confident woman.

Age is just a number:

Nirupama Rajeev is shown as having too much of complex because of ageing. She always has an inferiority complex that her husband looks younger than her. As a catalyst for her complex, everyone mistakes her husband as her brother too. There are instances in the movie where Nirupama tries to make herself look young. We can see such women in today's society where they are very much worried about their ageing. The movie has successfully conveyed the meaning that age is just a number in a woman's life. If they want to achieve something in life, their dreams and their aspirations, the only thing required is the determination to succeed. No barriers can really restrict them from achieving their goals. There is no age barrier for a woman's dream.

Concept of Organic farming

Today we live in an age where we cannot get pesticide/chemical free vegetables. It is too harmful but no one cares about it. Everyone knowingly or unknowingly consumes impure and poisonous food items. Even though people have all the facilities to have their own vegetable gardens, none of them take the effort to have one with in their reach. The concept of Organic farming portrayed through the movie was well received by many people throughout Kerala. The movie has also succeeded in promoting the concept of organic farming. Many women, especially in Kerala were inspired by the movie and thereby started their own kitchen garden concept. The movie made many people realize that vegetable garden can be on roof top too.

After the success of the movie in Malayalam, the same was remade in to tamil, "*36 Vayadhinile*" where the lead role was played by Jyothika. In both the movies, it was the comeback of the heroines after a gap. Hence, the casting was apt for the success of the movie and it was well received by the audience. The movie won many awards in various front. It was appreciated by many people. Both the actors Manju Warrier and Jyothika won best actress award which shows the appreciation for the movie among the audience.

CONCLUSION

Movies have a powerful role in influencing the society. This movie was well appreciated by the audience and hence influenced the society a lot. The concept of biofarming was well received by the audience and many households started having their own kitchen garden thereby cultivating organic vegetables at their roof tops. In living their family life, many women forget their true identity. The movie has reminded many such women to live their life as per their real identity but without affecting their family bonding. There are many women today who carry their unreal selves just for the sake of someone else. The character influenced a lot of woman and they took the character Nirupama Rajeev as a motivation for them to pursue their dreams at the same time taking care of the family responsibilities. Nirupama Rajeev could leave a signature in the society. The movie conveys the message that if a desire to succeed is there from within, then any woman can leave their signature in the society.

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