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STORY IN “ULLOZHUKKU”**

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Abstract

“*Ullozhukku*” (Under Current) is a 2024 Malayalam language drama film from India featuring female protagonists who represent two generations and the clash of their ideologies, experiences, and agency. It challenges the conventional positioning of women, motherhood, and the commodification of women. The dilemmas faced by the female protagonists, Anju (Parvathy Thiruvothu) and her mother-in-law, Leelamma (Urvashi), are both similar and different. The plot revolves around Anju, who has lost her husband and is pregnant with her lover’s child, and Leelamma, who feels relieved upon hearing the news of the pregnancy, even in the wake of her son’s death, as his lineage will continue. While the female-centered movie does not depict violent retributions, the weight of emotions lingers in the silences and gaps in dialogue. The film opens with the female characters constrained by societal and cultural norms; as the story progresses, they gradually loosen these ties and find solidarity in each other. Nature plays a significant role, a spectator, as the relentless rain and flooded surroundings amplify the characters' psychological distress. The direction, cinematography and narrative style add to the sensitive storyline. It is as if the rainy blues have enveloped the film, awaiting sunlight, as the characters long to breathe freely after the funeral and seek reconciliation.

Title of the Film: “Ullozhukku”

Original Language and Year of Release: Malayalam, 2024

Director: Christo Tomy

Production Details: RSVP and MacGuffin Pictures

Duration: 2 hour 3 minutes

Genre: Drama

1. Overview of the Film:

Ullozhukku, the 2024 movie portrays the lives of two women who are caught up in the alienation resulting from their marriages. The movie stands tall in its discussion of role of women in the patriarchal hegemonic society and the quest for female agency. Commodification of women, often present in the Indian context in the form of dowry is touched upon in the heated arguments amongst the characters.

2. Aims of the Review:

This film review aims to take a step back from the astounding performance of the lead actors, Urvashi and Parvathy Thiruvothu, the internal conflicts in the family, the deceptive moves, and focus on the depiction of nature taking up the position of a witness. The aesthetic and thematic elements are accentuated through the brilliant scenery in the film, the constant and flood. Nature swells and ebbs with the psychological upheaval of the characters.

3. Plot Synopsis

Anju is a newly married woman who finds herself caught in the quagmire of hospital visits and caring for her deteriorating husband, who wanted her solely for satisfying his sexual needs. She discovers sexual autonomy through an extramarital affair with her ex-lover, Rajeev, and becomes pregnant. Anju's husband succumbs to his illness and dies. Leelamma, Anju's mother-in-law, is hopeful and prepares for the birth of the child under the false belief that her son is the father. When Anju conveys the truth, Leelamma feels betrayed. The heated conversations lead to the realization that Anju's husband was sick even before their marriage, a fact that was concealed from her. In the end, Anju decides to live with Leelamma, as Rajeev desired the plot

of land Leelamma promised her and questioned her purity. The two women find solace in each other.

4. Thematic Analysis

The subjecthood of women has been a major theme in many Indian movies yet what sets *Ullozhukku* apart is the subtlety of the raw emotions depicted and the vulnerability of characters. The two women were victims of a patriarchal society that placed little importance on women. Leelamma was married at a young age, even though she wished to study, while Anju had to marry as per the wishes of her parents, as they were not affluent enough to pay a high dowry. They both endured an unsatisfactory marriage. Leelamma lacked the agency to go against the norms of society and embodied motherhood with authority, which increased her status in the cultural tapestry. Anju was bold enough to employ her sexual autonomy and agency, to give voice to her needs.

5. Nature as a Sentient Spectator

The setting of the movie, Kuttanad in Alappuzha, provides the audience with scenery that unfolds in the narrative, the cold and wet backwaters. Nature acts as a sentient spectator, especially water, soaking up the feelings of the characters, adding to those feelings, and the experience of the audience. A movie depicting constant scenes of flooding is a master stroke way for the director to successfully convey the intended feelings- alienation, depravity, and suffocation, especially to an audience who had experienced the 2018 Kerala floods. The stagnant and isolated nature is similar to the characters in the movie. Anju wished to escape and after a failed first attempt is determined to leave, a desire dismissed due to Rajeev's chauvinistic

behaviour in the end.

It hits close to home, and the house itself is a cage with no locks for Anju. The scenes in the movie rarely show any closed doors in the house, everything is open and accessible, as if daring Anju to decide for herself and set herself free. The shots of vast lands submerged in water and an unlocked house with people contrast sharply with the helplessness felt by the characters. Anju seems to be barricaded by the flood and the throng of people arriving for the funeral of her husband.

Even the dead body of Thomaskutty, Anju's husband, is stranded in the flooded land, waiting for the flood to recede. The dead husband seems to have a stronger hold on Anju.

The constant rain adds to the emotional constriction of the characters and in turn the audience. The depressive nature of the constant rain, the dim rooms and the sound of people moving through the water creates an array of motion with no decisive end or fruitful culmination. The rain is present in Anju's traumatic dream too. It's as if they are in a loop of drowning and resurfacing. The tears fall like rain the film, constantly with small breaks.

The only sunny scenes are the opening scene with Anju and her lover, the wedding and the final scene where Anju and Leelamma return to the house. The female characters seem to have found a way to survive the undercurrents (*ulluzhukku*) and swim through it to safety. The nature breathes, wells, and ebbs away with the characters.

6. Cinematic Technique and Performances

The cinematographer, Shehjad Jalal, was successful in creating a different kind of darkness in *Ullozhukku* as he wanted, resonating the turbulent greyness of the characters. An interesting fact is that there are no full length songs in the movie but Sushin Shyam has created a

background score that leaves an impact, seamlessly part of the narrative like the white noise of nature.

Urvashi has created an intensely impactful performance with her facial expressions, movements, and even the nuances in her crying are to be appreciated. Parvathi was an equal in her performance with dense portrayal of her character, the conflicts, determination and acceptance.

However, the repetitive structure and atypical thematic content may prove challenging for some viewers to engage with.

7. Conclusion

Ullozhukku has left a mark of its own as it dealt with complex human relationships, familial structure and female narrative as never before. There are no overly exaggerated scenes, no pulling of hair or death threats. The silences are the loudest in the movie. The cultural significance lies in the discussion of the film, which will lead to analysing the position of women, freedom, agency, and sexual autonomy in a male-dominated cultural realm.

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