

Critique

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## The Apartment with Two Women: Clumsy to Imbibe



South Korea has a spree of women directors like Bora Kim, Yim Soon-rye, Jeon Go-Woon, Moon So-ri, Gina Kim, Park Chan-ok, Boo Ji-young, Shin Su-won, and many others. Most of these women directors are well-established winners of Venice and Cannes. In the midst, Kim Se-in is said to be a promising director of South Korea, and she has carved out a niche with her new film "The Apartment with Two Women." The film is deemed one of the most dysfunctional families of recent memory, not found in films of others; it unfolds its dirty laundry, aired out in the hypnotic style; Initially, one gets on to an ambitious and surprisingly fresh debut from 29-year-old director Kim Se-in. She is said to be a discovery in recent Korean cinema.

It may be mentioned that South Korea does not have eminent filmmakers like Kim Ki-duk (1960 - 2020), Bong Joon-ho (1969 -), Park Chan-wook (1963 -), Im Kwon-taek (1936 -), Lee Chang-dong (1954 -), Hong Sang-soo (1960 -), Kim Jee-woon (1964 -), Kwak Jae-yong (1959), etc. They are invincible in any which way. Venice, Cannes, Berlin, and Locarno have crowded most of these directors. So, it is easily understood how male filmmakers are far ahead of their women counterparts!! And this has been a regular process: Busan Int film festival, to its credit, has several celebrated directors who still stand out as unputdownable, even now even today.

The plot of the film under scanner starts in a boisterous mood and structured performance, Yang Mal-bok plays Soo-kyung, a gregarious middle-aged

woman with red highlights in her hair who is quick to chivvy and perpetually needs to be the centre of attention. Most of the time, though it looks funny, the target of her constant outbursts is her daughter Yi-jung (Lym Ji-ho), a young office worker, behaves like a withdrawn teenager. Unfortunately, this female director is not much concerned with social and topical themes sunk in poor economic layers. It radiates a stodgy charm that global film lovers like to see and learn. Yet Kim Se-in. propels her kind of film without caring to what extent her work is able to inspire the public who do not appear to be impressed that much though, in a tragi-comedy sense, there are some humour and stings that remain tagged to the film.

The average viewers do not appear to be impressed that much though in the tragi-comedy sense, there are some humours and stings remain tagged to the film.

The film begins on a low tone and note but gradually picks up while the film progresses. It is marked by polar emotional opposites who live together in a cramped apartment and have never gotten along smoothly. Things suddenly lower to a lot worse between them when Soo-kyung intentionally knocks her daughter over with a car; in the wake of harsh event and reality: and usually the diffident Yi-jung sides against her when the insurance investigators swoop around and ready to take her to court.

The director is wise to avoid minimal exotic drama with a legal spat germinating in the background, Soo-kyung is also contemplating moving in with her boyfriend, but she can't stand his daughter. Meanwhile, Yi-jung tries to be friendly with a new female colleague at work, but the more she opens up to her, the more awkward their relationship appears.

Though it's been branded with a fairly drab English title, *The Apartment with Two Women's* original Korean title, which hints at as 'Two Women Wearing the Same Underwear,' is a far more righteously representation of the film that captures its unusual tone and the unique symbiotic nature of the given explosive mother-daughter combo.

Curiously, the ploy of the director is used in a way where the underwear pops up frequently in the

film. The protagonists are often slipping in and out of them, sometimes stained by menstrual blood. And in one extraordinary sequence, Yi-kyung illuminates her mother with her smartphone light as she listlessly puts her underwear on after a blackout interrupts her shower.

All long Soo-kyung and Yi-jung hate and spat each other, but they have the same craving for human interaction. However, they face similar issues as women, and they are socially awkward to the degree that unsettles people around them to extreme unease. The film appears rather slow and manky at times despite the cinematic jugglery used in the maiden film. One wonders why a debutant filmmaker goes mardy and amok to deal in a theme not always palpable to the film buffs or ordinary viewers. The gambado the director employs in the fabric of the gothic film often skids and seldom jells in its finale.

It is phony to watch how they are bound to one another despite prima-facie rugged surface as is found. Besides, in a flashback, Soo-kyung abandons Yi-jung on her graduation day for a night of drinking. This seems oddball, but as one finds, her last stop is inevitably the apartment she shares with her daughter. Yi-jung tries to move out, but she learns that other people are browned off with capable handling of her idiosyncrasies. Thus, and quickly finally, she is back where she started. Like the panties that bind them, Soo-kyung and Yi-jung occasionally must clean and air out their relationship in a merry note, but it doesn't take much for it to get broken again.

In a role that calls to mind a ferocious Jeon Do-yeon, Yang utterly dominates the screen with her magnetic acting. Though Soo-kyung's charisma should by all rights eclipse all the other characters, Yang's chemistry with the rest of the cast fuels some incredible scenes, particularly those she shares with Lim Ji-ho, playing her daughter in her first feature film role. At first, Yi-jung resembles the many quiet young girls in low-budget Korean cinema, but Lim soon turns her into a special character.

Indeed, the two women could not be further apart in character or temperament. Sukyung is a brazen, hot-tempered woman who wears blazing bright colours and lives by a philosophy of never apologizing for who she is. Yijung dresses in baggy,

washed-out sweatshirts and hides behind a tumble of long black hair. She covers from the world while Sukyung boldly strides towards it.

The undeclared war between them is marked by a lifetime of resentment and disappointment. Yijung has good reason to believe her mother has never loved or nurtured her. Sukyung regards her daughter as little more than an ungrateful parasite. There are faint echoes of Toni Erdmann in a film that lances the rage and exasperation that can mark a family relationship, but these two women have even more in common with the sisters in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*

Yi-Jung's craving for a mother's love manifests as a clinginess that suffocates anyone who might befriend her. Over 140 minutes, their words cut, and the wounds fester. Frequently heart-breaking, this well-observed portrait of dysfunction chronicles how families build each other up and cruelly tear each other down in the way only families can. A turning point in the film comes when Sukyung attempts to run her daughter over with her car

and pass it off as an accident. By then, anyone who's been paying attention knows that their relationship was a flaming wreck long before that.

Well over two hours, the film makes a kite flying, "Director Kim Se-in's debut is a bleak look at how cycles of abuse and neglect can perpetuate unchecked." said a Korean film critic. Kim Se-in's film is one of the long sides for an indie family drama. Still, each scene highlights raw energy, thanks to compact editing and Kim's clever directorial choices, which keep twisting our expectations as the narrative hurtles down unexpected paths. Though emotionally intense, the film is elevated through its giddy and twisted sense of humour, even in its darkest moments. It is above terminal boredom work, to be precise. But it needs more to be compact, but it is not to be.

However, *The Apartment with Two Women* is one of the small graduation projects from the Korean Academy of Film Arts (KAFA) this year. There's no doubt that Director Kim is ready for her next challenge with a shaken background.

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