

The stoning of soraya m. essay



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Imagine you hold a deep dark secret, one that could scar people's minds. The only way that you can let people know about your secret, is if you go out of your way, possibly by putting your life into danger. Would you still do it? Now imagine, you were the witness of your dear niece that was forced to be stoned because of a punishable act that she never even committed. You don't want to let such cruel incident going by unknown to the rest of the world. Would you do whatever it takes to let your voice be heard? Director, Cyrus Nowrasteh really knows how to capture his audience's sympathy in the film, ' The Stoning of Soraya M.' set in Iran.

This devastating, drama-crime film is based on French-Iranian journalist, Freidoune Shahebjam's book *La Femme Lapidée*, written in 1990, that is based on a true story (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Stoning_of_Soraya_M.).

This film gives the true meaning of emotional abuse and one can have a first hand experience as they share the main character's tragedy throughout this R-rated film. The outstanding acting, storyline, use of dialogue, powerful themes, and background music contribute to a film that will definitely not disappoint its viewers and grab their attention from the beginning until the very end. A French-Iranian journalist (James Cavieziel) finds himself abandoned in a remote village in Iran due to his car breaking down. He is approached by Zahra (Shohreh Aghdashloo), who demands him to listen to the tragic incident of the stoning of her beloved, innocent niece, Soraya (Mozhan Marno), which took place the previous day.

Soraya was wrongly accused of having committed adultery. The journalist is then determined to leave the village successfully with this dreadful secret, ready to reveal it to the world. Perhaps one of the reasons that makes this movie so appealing is because of the excellent acting of the main characters in this film. Zahra's bold and fearless nature allows her to stand out. This is evident in the scene where the mullah comes to propose a 'temporary wedding' with Soraya, but Zahra furiously gives him a piece of her mind and yells at him for even suggesting such a repulsive idea.

If it weren't for her persistence and determination to reach the journalist and unravel the disturbing incident, then there would have been no way in which the world would come to know the truth. The courageous and humble Soraya invites the viewers to empathise and share her feelings, as she is getting tormented by her husband in the dinner table, or abused by him publicly in the village square or even the harsh stoning scene. Each one of these scenes makes the viewers more heartfelt as they grow closer to her. This can be contrasted with the acting seen in the film 'Provoked'.

Kiranjit (Aishwarya Rai) fails to make the audience believe her abusive situation due to the clichéd acting, which puts the viewer off to sleep. The fact that rather new faces were used, allows for the viewer to believe the roles that these actors were put in, compared to actors that appear in a lot of films, such as in 'Provoked', Aishwarya Rai is former Miss Universe and has appeared in around 40 films, both of Indian and English cinema. A film cannot be successful unless it has a gripping storyline. You can count on that while watching 'The Stoning of Soraya M.', the shocking middle-aged practices are shown in this film, and capture the audience's attention.

It brings the movie to life and shows the real life experiences in certain parts of the world that people are not exposed to everyday. Ali (Navid Negahban) decides to divorce his wife, Soraya, who he has four children with, because he wishes to marry a 14- year old girl, and as his wife disagrees, he decides to falsely accuse her of adultery, which causes her to be stoned. From the title of the movie, the viewer knows to expect some gruesome content, however the way in which the story as well as the tension builds up uniformly, allows the viewer to prepare for an unpleasantly surprising ending. ' Not without my daughter' is an example of a movie that has quite a drastic change in the middle of the movie; there is a 180-degree change of the once loving husband into an abusive man in a matter of few days. This usually discourages the viewer to continue watching the whole movie. It makes a true-life story seem quite untrue.

" The voices of women do not matter here. I want you to take my voice with you," says Zahra to the journalist as she begins to uncover the incident. A good movie is one that lingers with you once it is over; this is because of the effective dialogue used in the film. The same can be said for ' The Stoning of Soraya M.' I just sat still for a couple of moments as the movie finished, and started recalling the quotes of the characters, especially those by the daring Zahra. " A Sheikh? More like a holy whore," is another piercing quote by Zahra.

The use of profound words adds to the severity of the movie. Whoever has watched this movie can say the same, they just start discussing the various scenes in the movie, this is the effect that powerful dialogue creates, it makes one think about the film long after it has finished, compared to films

with rather clichéd dialogue as in 'Provoked'. The theme of corrupted Islam followed by Ali and the Mullah versus the real Islam followed by Zahra and Soraya adds intensity and excitement to the film, as viewers are forced to see how Islam is given a bad image because of people like Ali and the Mullah. The Mullah, who should be considered a 'Muslim leader', in fact is far from that. He tries to hide his dark past of serving time in prison; Ali who is aware of the Mullah's past bribes him to accept the stoning of Soraya. Seeing as he can easily be bribed, rather than stick to the word of God, shows that he is a weak follower of Islam and it is his exterior that makes him appear as a religious man.

Thankfully there are characters to balance out and show the true image of Islam such as Zahra and Soraya. Through Soraya's constant reference to God, and how she warns Ebrahim (David Diaan), one of the village officials, that 'God is watching,' it is obvious from her behaviour and actions that she is a true believer, as she is truthful, honest and justified. What made me appreciate Islam more was after seeing the way in which Soraya reacted towards the entire village accusing her of adultery. She realises that it is useless to try proving her innocence to these people, and decides to accept her fate. It is this very decision of hers that revealed to the whole world the unjust act that was made against her and will allow people to see how some of these 'so-called' Muslims manipulate Islam to their benefit, hence showing that people corrupt Islam's public image.

Films such as 'The Rules of Engagement' promote a negative image towards Islam. It shows that Muslims have the intention to kill Americans, whenever possible, therefore it doesn't give the audience a chance to see the positive

side of Islam and how it is a peaceful religion. During the stoning scene, apart from the devastating moment where the husband, sons and even father of Soraya take chances at throwing rocks at her, it is definitely the background music that influences the emotions of the viewers. While Soraya is being accompanied to the spot where she is to be stoned, there are beats of heavy drums, which signify that a sacrifice is going to take place and a woman moaning with struggle yet a sense of true strength in her tone. During the actual stoning scene, the same woman's moan changes to a more pleasant tone, with alternating high and low tones in her voice.

It reflects Soraya's acceptance and the injustice that she has to face; it also shows the pureness of her soul, in the choice of light instruments such as the piano and the flute. This makes the viewer evoke pathos for Soraya, but at the same time it makes them fond of her courage. The music that is built up towards the moment of Soraya's passing is a rather tender and elevated tone compared to the previous music during the preparation and actual stoning moment. This reveals her freedom and breakthrough of struggle; this music is accompanied by the memories of her two daughters in the meadow, perhaps one of the happiest scenes in the movie. It can be agreed that the prolonged scene of the stoning has a grotesque and gruesome exposure on the audience and may make them feel uneasy.

However, I believe that such a strong scene was necessary in this movie; to demonstrate the sad practices that are carried out to this day; this is the main part of the film that brings out the empathy and completely moves the viewer. It was necessary to include an effectively powerful stoning scene, as the viewers would expect something of a similar content because of the title

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of the movie itself. The Stoning of Soraya M. opens up the viewer's eyes to see how the Muslim people coming from rural areas misuse the practice of Islam, and this film invites more people to accept Islam as a true religion through the reference of true Islam by Zahra.

It brings out every emotion within the viewer, such as pain, anger, suffering and happiness. I believe that the elements of acting, storyline, dialogue, themes and background music adds excitement, hype, tension and a touching factor to this highly anticipated must-watch film!