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Rubina Ramji

Cape Breton University, ruby_ramji@cbu.ca

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Umrika

Abstract

This is a film review of *Umrika* (2015), directed by Prashant Nair.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



Umrika
(2015)

Directed by Prashant Nair

Umrika is an endearing film about the bonds of brotherhood, dreams of big city life, and family responsibility in 1970s India. Rama (Suraj Sharma) watches as his older brother, Udai (Prateik Babbar), leaves their small family village to start a new life in America (aka Umrika). As the entire village waves him off, we see pride in his mother's face, a dream she has had for her son to make it big. But as the weeks turn to months, there is no word from Udai about his journey to this new land. His mother grows ever more despondent, and she drags her husband to the village priest to pray for her missing son (10 rupees please).

Suddenly, when all hope seems lost, the letters start arriving from America, describing a land where "anything is possible." The letters include pictures of different cities in America, scenes of ice skating and food foreign to India. Then one day Rama and Udai's father dies

suddenly, and we find out a secret; the postman has been delivering letters written by the father in order to alleviate the mother's worry. Rama, the loving younger brother who has been left behind, always loyal to his mother and father, sets out to find out the truth about Udai's fate.

Rama follows his brother's footsteps, arriving in the port city of Mumbai, where his brother's friend now lives. He takes Rama in and supports him; Rama, meanwhile, searches out the man who is in charge of helping people get to "Umrika," and eventually finds out that people are being smuggled into the United States for large sums of money. Rama tries to figure out how he too can get there, but discovers the truth about his brother. He did not go to America, but had run away from home to start a life unfettered by the dreams of his mother. Rama, the ever dutiful son, continues to write letters home to his mother as Udai, and forgets that he too may be missed.

But Rama has his own dreams. His brother Udai is the prodigal son, Rama is the dutiful son, but he also realizes that his own dreams are as important as his mother's hopes and desires. Udai, realizing how much has been done for him by his younger brother in the years he has been away, helps Rama achieve the dream of seeing "Umrika." In this emotional and sometimes humorous movie that follows the trajectory to America of these two young men over ten years, we see how the dreams of both can be shattered and yet remain bright. America continues to remain the country of bright lights and dizzying sights despite its atrocities, and Rama learns that he is as important as his revered older brother; his dreams matter and his future is also bright.