

'Miss Pettigrew...' cerebral film with good humour

Film: 'Miss Pettigrew Lives For A Day'; Director: Bharat Nalluri; Cast: Frances McDormand, Amy Adams, Lee Pace, Cirian Hinds; Rating: ***

The past few months have seen the dominance of blockbuster action movies in Hollywood. Smaller, pleasant movies like 'Miss Pettigrew Lives for A Day' are at the risk of falling through the cracks though they really deserve much more notice. Held together by a witty script, fine acting and an excellent period look, this pleasant surprise of a movie directed by Bharat Nalluri is a must watch.

Nalluri is an Indian born director raised in Britain and developed his skill in British television before he took on this movie. He shows great promise with this film and he deserves to helm more prestigious projects.

A period movie, though a comedy, 'Miss Pettigrew...' already has quite a few odds stacked against it to make it a hit these days. But with actors like Oscar winner Frances McDormand and the upcoming young actress Amy Adams giving some wonderful performances, this film is bound to be liked by audiences.

The movie never veers off into silliness or slapstick and maintains a level of sophistication even as it delivers on the humour. On occasions it gets a little deeper and serious and towards the end takes on a heavier, more melancholic note. It's the great acting that makes these transitions in emotions believable.

Miss Pettigrew (McDormand) is a governess who can't seem to hold on to a job and out of desperation deceives the aspiring singer/actress Delysia Lafosse. She spends just one day with her but it turns out to be quite an eventful day.

Miss Pettigrew guides Delysia in choosing the right man to love and manages to get interested in love herself. She has to make some important decisions knowing all the while that they might cost her a lot.

There is also this pervasive sense of tension since it is set during the days just before World War II. This tension brings in a much needed balance and keeps everything happening on screen in perspective.

McDormand does her job perfectly, as expected from such a talented actress as herself. The surprise in this movie might just be Amy Adams. She has shown promise ever since she made her debut in 'Catch Me If You Can' and the more recent 'Charlie Wilson's War.' Here Adams confirms that promise and it shouldn't be long before she gets lead actress status for more prominent projects.

Her character on the surface seems flaky but there are scenes where we clearly get to see the true person and Adams is completely believable. She does a fine job of maintaining the shrill, delicate and spoilt celebrity but also the character's ambitious and steely resolve.

It remains to be seen if Nalluri has the potential to become a big player like M. Night Shayamalan, though Hollywood may not be quite ready to entrust him with big budget projects.

For those looking for something light, yet cerebral with a little heart, 'Miss Pettigrew Lives For A Day' will prove to be time and money well spent.

Sevanand Gaddala (© IANS / India eNews)