

## **Whether the child protagonist has anything else but has his dreams: An academic review of the movie "I am Kalam"**

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### **Introduction**

"I am Kalam," directed by Mr. Nila Madhab Panda and released on August 5, 2011, stands as an impactful Indian movie that has garnered recognition both nationally and internationally. The movie, while carrying the title of India's former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, intriguingly chooses not to delve into his early life but rather focuses on the compelling journey of its young protagonist, 'Chhotu.' Portrayed by Harsh Mayar, Chhotu's story becomes a poignant representation of determination, zeal, and the transformative power of education.

The ensemble cast, including Meena Mir, Gulshan Grover, Pitobash Tripathy, Hassan Saad, Beatrice Ordeix, Sanjay Chauhan, and Biswajeet Bal, adds depth to the narrative by bringing life to a spectrum of characters that contribute to the film's rich tapestry. Notably, the movie emphasizes the resilience of individuals facing formidable challenges and underscores the significance of education, especially for underprivileged children. Through Chhotu's inspiring journey, the movie advocates for the transformative potential of education in shaping a brighter future and breaking the cycle of poverty.

### **Analysis of the Movie from the Academic Lens**

The child protagonist named 'Chhotu' played a significant role in the movie. The character faces the harsh reality of not being able to attend school due to his circumstances. Instead, he finds himself working in a roadside hotel, which can be seen as a reflection of the challenges that many underprivileged children face in accessing education. Chhotu's situation symbolizes the struggle of numerous children who are forced to sacrifice their educational opportunities for the immediate needs of survival, portraying the societal disparities that exist in providing equal educational opportunities. Without looking back, he puts his ambition high to go to school and become a reputed person in life whom society would love, appreciate, and respect. The movie portrays Chhotu's pursuit of knowledge as exceptional and had an excellent calibre to grasp everything he experienced in real life.

Along with the protagonist Chhotu, in the movie, another character named 'Laptan' is seen where he plays a vicious role. Laptan is very jealous of Chhotu's calibre for he is so ambitious and accustomed towards study despite going through the worst phase of his life, which determines his affection and vigour towards study as he could understand that education is the only weapon that he could use to get rid of poverty being prevalent in his family, and succeed in life. Chhotu believes in actions rather than his destiny, for he could understand that everything can get changed by actions that would help forge a better future. His calibre gets observed in different movie scenes, from learning to do everything quickly to efficiently acquiring concepts of different things. Though Chhotu wants to study, because of poverty that exists in the family, he has to work. This incident represents the miserable

scenario of a class seen in India, who are working day and night incessantly for earning a piece of bread for their survival.

As portrayed in the movie, when Chhotu was not in the hotel, Laptan enviously burnt all of his books. The vicious character Laptan never wants him to read other than only working. Chhotu gets disappointed and frustrated after the incident takes place and finally decides to leave the job from the roadside hotel and embarks on a journey to meet the then President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam. This act of him symbolizes the power of his dreams, determination, and the pursuit of education.

Chhotu, inspired by the teachings and vision of Dr. Kalam, takes a bold step to transcend his current circumstances and seek a brighter future. The act of leaving the Dhaba and hitching a ride with Sukha Singh's truck represents a metaphorical journey towards education, self-improvement, and the pursuit of a higher purpose. It underlines the transformative potential of education and the ability of individuals to shape their destinies, regardless of their initial hardships.

### **Provisions and initiatives of the Government of India to support and safeguard the educational rights of children**

Every child is born with the right to receive an education, be he belongs to a poor or rich family. Several constitutional provisions have been made in India to refrain children from working in different places at the school-going age. Child-labour prevention acts like 'The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016' have got implemented in the country for the same purpose. This act is crucial in understanding Chhotu's situation in the movie. The prohibition of employing children below 14 years aligns with the challenges faced by Chhotu, who is engaged in labor instead of attending school. The punitive measures for employers violating regulations emphasize the gravity of the issue, shedding light on the social and legal consequences of child labor.

In our country, to make education compulsory for all children, the Right to Education Act (RTE) has been implemented from April 1, 2010. This act emphasizes the fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 to 14 to receive free and compulsory education. Chhotu's inability to access education despite this constitutional provision underscores the gap between legislation and implementation, reflecting the systemic challenges faced by underprivileged children in realizing their right to education.

The 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' (SSA) has been operationalized since 2001 to universalize primary education throughout the country, which is free and compulsory. It is a flagship program aimed at universalizing primary education, provides context to the broader educational landscape in India. Chhotu's struggle for education in the movie highlights the disparities that initiatives like SSA aim to address. The film, in turn, serves as a narrative that underscores the importance of such programs in bridging educational gaps and ensuring access to quality education for all children.

### **Conclusion:**

The movie "I am Kalam" transcends its role as a cinematic masterpiece, evolving into a compelling call to action for society. Beyond its narrative brilliance, the film serves as a powerful advocate for investing in the education of underprivileged youth. Through the triumph of hope over adversity, the movie becomes a poignant reminder that education acts as a beacon of light, capable of guiding individuals through even the darkest circumstances.

The storyline, centered around the indomitable spirit of the protagonist 'Chhotu,' inspires viewers to recognize education not only as a transformative force but as a fundamental right that can pave the way for a more equitable and just generation. In essence, "I am Kalam" stands as a testament to the belief that nurturing the educational aspirations of every child is not just a societal duty but a collective investment in a brighter, more inclusive future.

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