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# R Madhavan: A Man with Myriad Masks Who Is a True Hallmark of a Performer | Opinion

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R Madhavan at News18 Showsha Reel Awards 2024.

R Madhavan has been winning everyone over with his stellar performance in Shaitaan. This has just added another feather to his hat.

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They call him Maddy. Some in the film world may think that actor R. Madhavan is mad not to step into the realm of a hero. I do not. By no means. He is an actor, wants to be an actor, not a star. Over the years, Madhavan, who was honoured with the Reel Icon Award at News18 Showsha Reel Awards recently, has masked himself with myriad faces, looks and mannerisms. The true hallmark of a performer – in the league of greats like Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri and to an extent Vikram Massey, who was fantastic in 12th Fail.

Much like his film career, Maddy dabbled in so many things before facing the camera. He grew up in Jamshedpur, graduated with a B.Sc degree and went on to join the National Cadet Co that fetched him a longish trip to England, where he trained in the British Army, Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. He did think of joining one of these but missed the cut-off age by six months. Their loss was India's gain. After a stint in public speaking, lecture tours and modelling, Madhavan, who grew up in a Tamil Brahmin household, decided to step into the world of make-believe.

The first years were tough: small television roles, before Mani Ratnam's Alaipayuthey in 2000 catapulted him to the big league. He became the newest romantic hero, maybe like Tamil cinema's Kathal Mannan (Kathal Mannan), Gemini Ganesh. Mani's work remains one of my favourites. Co-starring with Shalini, Madhavan played the part of

poignant pauses.

Set against the backdrop of Chennai’s suburban trains and decrepit stations, love blossoms between Karthik (Madhavan) and Shakti (Shalini). Their families are against the union, and the couple elope. The sudden death of Shakti’s father creates a rift between the husband and wife. Madhavan brought out the emotions of affection and anger in a splendid way, and Alaipayuthey is one of Indian cinema’s greats. It was later made in Hindi with a different set of actors, really no match for Ratnam’s work and Madhavan’s acting calibre.

The other Maddy film I liked was Kannathil Muthamittal (2002, also created by Mani Ratnam) – in which the actor essays a budding writer. Set against the backdrop of the Sri Lankan civil strife that ravished the picturesque island nation and ruined its economy, Madhavan’s Thiruchelvan and his wife (Simran) adopt a baby girl from a refugee camp in Rameshwaram. They call her Amudha, and on her ninth birthday, they reveal the truth. The girl is traumatised, and we see an agonising Madhavan – who is in a dilemma. Should he have let his daughter into the secret? We see him slowly emerging as an actor, graduating from a purely romantic role to a more mature character – as a worried father. Based on writer Sujatha’s novel, Amuthavum Avanum, Kannathil Muthamittal premiered at the 2002 Tokyo International Film Festival, and I remember Madhavan was a hit among the locals.

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Another movie of Madhavan I liked – and which explored a side other than his lover boy image — was the 2016 Irudhi Suttru. He is a boxing coach here, and an ill-tempered one, having been sidelined by the powers that be. His performance as a hardened man, jaws tight and a ferocious look was spell-binding. He won a Filmfare Award for performance.

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In 2022, Maddy explored direction in Rocketry: The Nambi Effect. A biopic, written, produced and helmed by him: he played the character, an Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) scientist, who was charged with espionage. The story spans Narayanan’s days from being a Princeton student to his ISRO appointment. Much like this plot that traces his life through the ages, Madhavan grew as an actor, and his part here seemed like the completion of an impressive arc.

Another one I would add to this list is Shaitaan. He is a villain here, terrorising a family like Robert DeNiro did in Cape Fear. Madhavan mixes humour and sheer evil into his character, frightening a family of four. He is psychopathic and the way his eyes glint with hatred proves that he is an actor who has truly arrived. And while

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actors like Shivaji Ganesan used theatrical gesticulations to play out their parts, Madhavan is cool and calculated, traversing his roles with finesse. Much like De Niro. Indeed!

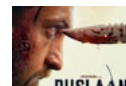
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