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Maddy's world

From his debut in Mani Ratnam's 'Alaipayuthey' to his latest 'Test', R Madhavan wears many masks



GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

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The world of cinema is so alluring that it knocks you down with its magical moments. Those who enter the hallowed portals of this motion and movement struggle to remain within the realm of reality. They begin to swim and float in the tides created by what is called the Seventh Art. Actor Madhavan is, perhaps, among the few who have managed to retain a semblance of sanity in an ocean of glittering madness.

His latest outing as Saravanan in 'Test' is a study in endurance. Saravanan dreams of making petrol from water, and in his desperation, he stoops to kidnapping a child for ransom. His screen wife, Kumudha (an admirable Nayanthara), gradually begins to understand her partner's "madness". We have a subplot here, that of match fixing in cricket. 'Test' may be one of the better-made Tamil titles, but in a climate of mediocrity, this is not saying much. The script and narrative left much to be desired, and even first-class performances could not lift the work.

Ranganathan Madhavan came into focus many years ago with his debut feature film, 'Alaipayuthey' (2000). As Karthik, his love for Shakti (played by Shalini) blossoms against the clatter of Chennai's suburban trains. 'Alaipayuthey' is, perhaps, auteur Mani Ratnam's career best; well-known for intimate cinema (like 'Mouna Ragam', 'Anjali' and 'Roja'), he certainly helped actors like Madhavan find their way to tinsel town.

Ratnam also pushed Madhavan into being an actor, not just a star. From the chocolate boy in 'Alaipayuthey', Madhavan turned into an artiste who could do a bewildering variety of roles.

In 'Tanu Weds Manu', he was sedate and sombre as an NRI doctor who travels to the country to find a bride. And who does he spot? Tanu, a headstrong brat, played by Kangana Ranaut. Although the young woman is in love with someone else, Manu (Madhavan) does not give up, and finally takes her home.




In 'Kannathil Muthamittal' (A Kiss on the Cheek), he essays a Tamil writer, who, along with his wife, adopts a baby girl, a Sri Lankan war orphan. Also helmed by Ratnam, the movie is a powerful reminder of the futility of strife, aggression and war. His role was not very different from the one in 'Alaipayuthey', but the actor made a dramatic turnaround in his later works. In 'Irudhi Suttru', he plays Prabhu Selvaraj, a failed boxer, accused of sexual misconduct. He is shunted from Delhi to Chennai and asked to train women boxers. Disillusioned with the crop he is served, he finally picks a fiery fisherwoman, Ezhil Madhi (Ritika Singh). Not only does Selvaraj find his gloves and feet, but also love, and this movie reminds one of 'My Fair Lady' in which Rex Harrison's Professor Henry Higgins picks up an abusive, venom-spewing flower girl (Audrey Hepburn) from the gutters to transform her into a lady of artistic merit and culture. Madhavan certainly wears many masks, and he does this with ease, even in negative roles. In 'Shaitaan', he played Vanraj Kashyap, who terrorises a family. Unlike other 'heroes', he is not afraid to don the greasepaint of a bad man. Maddy, as he is endearingly called, is confident of his craft. Also, his flawless Hindi (he grew up in Jamshedpur) and equally good Tamil make him an actor that any director would love to see on his/her sets.

Maybe, his real-life skills made him into an accomplished actor. Maddy was in the NCC and did his BSc. 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. And what a world he has created!

— **The writer is a movie critic**

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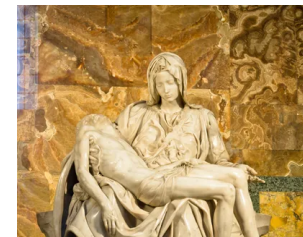
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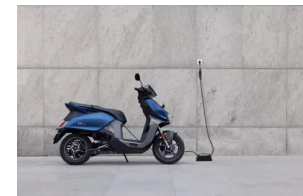
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Remembering Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia

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