Maya

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A special moment for Maya and Maduri

You may enter the movie theatre thinking you know what to expect…Yet as the story unfolds, it grips your mind and begins to touch your soul. Maya is not just another movie…

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe

Ranjan Ramanayake

A horror thriller, Maya is about a disturbed spirit that takes control of a human body to seek vengeance for the injustice caused to her during her human life. The hero of the movie, Malan is played by Pubudu Chathuranga, who is also the script writer. However, what sets this movie apart is that Maya, the heroine, is a transgender who is played by Sri Lankan superstar Ranjan Ramanayake.

Malan is a young man who lives with his mother and elder brother's family. He leads a carefree life being petted by his family and playing cricket with friends. While he is brave and protects women in trouble, he fears the dark and supernatural beings. However, Malan's worst fears come alive when he and his friends awaken the dead by attempting to play a cricket match on an abandoned plot of land.

The role of Maya was first offered to Ranjan by Sades Kumar, the producer, Pubudu Chathuranga and Donald Jayantha, co-director. Ranjan's initial reaction was to decline as the character was transsexual and would cause controversy. "After I read the script I asked them whether I could play the role of the hero instead, because I would be more comfortable rather than play the role of Maya," he said. However, he was told "you will play the most powerful character in the movie."

Yet, Ranjan was not convinced and did not give in. Finally one day the trio went to his house and told him that as the script had been written with him in mind, if he did not agree to play Maya then they would have to move on to another movie. Ranjan agreed.

The movie outstandingly combines comedy and horror, keeping the audience entranced to the screen. The cinematography and production is of very high quality, yet to be seen in Sri Lankan cinema.

Maya is also one of the highest budgeted movies in Sri Lanka. Indian experts handled all the on-screen stunts, graphics, choreography and effects. A-Grade stunt masters were approached for the movie and it was with Silva, who has worked with Rajinikanth, Kamal Haasan and Vije, who choreographed the fight scene of the movie, which was filmed in Cochin, India. While Maya was filmed both in India and Sri Lanka, for scenes in Sri Lanka too, experts from India was sourced.

While Maya is a remake of the Indian movie Kanchana, Sri Lankan features and elements have been expertly incorporated to give a unique character to the film. "The credit has to go to the script writer, Pubudu Chathuranga, who introduced characters that were not in the original movie such as the Buddhist monk."

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Ranjan says, Maya was the most challenging character that he has played in his

entire career. “I had to completely transform my body to portray a woman’s figure. Heavy make-up, wigs and wearing a draped saree, then walking like a woman, mixing food and even acting out the fight scenes with feminine gestures was demanding,” he explained. While Ranjan did his research on how to portray the character, he did not copy anyone, “I did this according to my style and though many suggested that I use a female voice I used my own voice, but changed it to suit the character.”

“It was challenging for the directors too, and I must say they were very patient. Sometimes when we were doing a scene, I would forget that I am a feminine character and I would suddenly return to my usual walk and style. Then they would say Ranjan you are not a hero in this film but a heroine,” he said with humour.

Through the drama, laughter and tears, Maya sends a strong message that transgenders should be treated with respect and be given equal opportunities. Ranjan elaborates, “it is a mistake that is made by many of us, even I have to admit to that. The transgender community goes through a lot of harassment for no fault of theirs. They cannot control what is happening to them. This happens due to a hormonal imbalance, trauma or environmental conditions. As such, families and society must not persecute them, but should embrace them. They should be given equal opportunities. Maya sends out that message.”

Maya is a must watch movie. It has transcended the norm to give a powerful social message that stays with you. No other Sri Lankan movie has had such an impact.

With Rajan Ramanayake in the lead, there is no surprise that Maya is a hit!