Sinahawa Atharin: A journey of love, life and detachment

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Buddhist philosophy is central to the themes of the film

Written and directed by Sanath Gunathilake, Sinahawa Atharin is based on a story by film producer Chaminda Perera and has been envisioned for many years. The film, produced by Sunil T, is finally set to be released and is a narrative that explores the subtle complexities of adult relationships and the underlining Buddhist philosophy.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara

Sanath Gunathilake, actor
and director, talks about
his latest film Sinahawa
Atharin

It was nearly two decades ago that Chaminda Perera related a story to Sanath Gunathilake on the set of Situ Kumariyo. The story resonated with him, and remained on his mind for years to come. Sanath Gunathilake wrote the script and

through the narrative emerged the Buddhist philosophies of karma and detachment. Closely studying these concepts he sought counsel from the Chief Incumbent at Bellanwila Temple to ascertain that the script remained true to the teachings of Buddhism. Thereafter attempts to make the film in Canada in line with the original storyline proved to be challenging and another seven years would pass until the film would finally see the light of day.

The story navigates around four key characters among whom the role of Kumari takes centre stage. The film begins with the young woman Hasini, who goes in search of her father. The events unfold such that she is compelled to write a story from the past and present the book to a Buddhist monk she encounters on her quest. As the monk begins to read the book, the film unfolds…

Kumari meets Richard, a French man and a friend of her brother's. Through his fondness for the country, its values and simplicity Richard is drawn to Kumari. Eventually they fall in love and although against the wishes of her parents they marry and begin their lives together in Sri Lanka. It is through this relationship that the film explores the depth and complexity of adult relationships as well as cultural differences, which finally take a toll on their relationship. Kumari yearns for love and attention and her desire to see to her husband's needs remain unfulfilled as Richard often keeps to himself pursuing his studies. He takes a more detached approach, often leaving Kumari to do as she pleases. This disparity in their natures leaves Kumari feeling isolated. She eventually meets Wimal, through her friendship with Kanthi, and in him she finds a caring and attentive nature that she has longed for. Their relationship blossoms and leads to further complications as the story unravels. At the end of their story Wimal, who by nature desires the simple way of life, leaves his all material ties behind to be ordained as a monk.

One of the crucial aspects in the making of the film was in the casting. The character of Kumari, a role most central to the story, is played by Semini Iddamalgoda. "This role is a very difficult one where a respectable woman who wishes to lead a successful family life eventually has an affair outside the marriage," says Sanath Gunathilake of the complex nature of her character. "Semini was ideal for the role, as I was looking for someone young, attractive and also who could understand the character of Kumari. Her character is of someone affectionate and playful but is also serious as you become better acquainted with her nature." It was only after casting Kumari that the other roles could be placed in proper context. Kris Henri takes on the role of Richard, a character that Sanath Gunathilake envisioned as someone young in age but appeared more mature. "In my mind I had

an image of someone who resembled the cricketer Daniel Vettori and even told the make up artists to create such a likeness," he reveals. The role of Hasini, daughter of Richard and Kumari is played by Hasini Gonagala, a casting that Sanath Gunathilake had set his sights on long before filming, on the set of Uttara where he worked with the actress. "Hasini Gonagala is a glamour girl and dancing star, however her character is of someone quite different – although the character portrays a modern girl her thinking and approach to life are very simple," he explains. Another character in the film played by Jayani Senenayake is Kumari's friend Kanthi whose interest in Wimal paves the way for the major events of the story to take place. The character of Wimal is played by Sanath Gunathilake himself, which proved to be a challenging endeavour in his career. He drew from his past experience with the film Viragaya which embraced similar themes of simplicity and detachment.

As befitting the characters and the storyline, much of the film is shot indoors, within houses. As the character of Wimal desires the serenity of nature, filming was also done at a villa in Bolgoda Lake while his ordainment and priesthood take place at an island in Beruwela where a priest once took residence. The selection of settings has been pivotal in further contributing to the depth of each character and narrating a suspenseful and thought provoking story.

"I strongly believe that anyone who sees this film will in some way be able to relate it to their own lives, however small the incident. There are instances that I, Sunil T and even the other actors have experienced this link with the film. And it is this connection with the audience that makes the film different," he states. The film is a must watch for newlyweds and those who are hoping to get married. Sinahawa Atharin will be released this month.