



FILM MOVEMENT

A Peck on the Cheek (Kannathil Muthamittal)



**Directed by Mani Ratnam
India, 2002 * 136 minutes *
In Tamil and Sinhala with English subtitles**

**WON - In Spirit for Freedom Award - *Jerusalem FF*
WON - 6 Silver Lotus Awards (Best Child Artist, Best Audiography, Best Editing,
Best Music Direction, Best Regional Film [Tamil], Best Lyrics) - *National Film
Awards, India*
WON - Audience Award (Best Film) - *Los Angeles Indian FF*
Official Selection. - *Toronto Int'l FF, Palm Springs Int'l FF, Cleveland Int'l
FF, Philadelphia Int'l FF, San Francisco Int'l FF***

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Film Synopsis:

A little girl's search for her biological mother who had abandoned her as a newborn baby is brought out poignantly in 'Kannathil Muthamittal'. With films like 'Mouna Ragam', 'Alaipayuthe' and now 'Kannathil Muthamittal', Maniratnam yet again proves that he is at his best when tackling human emotions and relationships. Amudha, adopted by Thiru and Indira and growing up with the couple's two sons, is blissfully unaware of her parentage, until the couple decides to inform her of it on her ninth birthday. At first shocked into disbelief, Amudha then expresses her determination to seek out for her biological mother. The search takes the family to strife-torn Sri Lanka, where Amudha comes face-to-face with reality, and reconciles herself to it.

Credits:

Mani Ratnam... writer/director/producer

G. Srinivasan... producer

Ravi K. Chandran... cinematographer

Sreekar Prasad... film editor

A.R. Rahman... music

Sabu Cyril... art director

Cast:

R. Madhavan... Thiruchelvan

Simran (alias) Rishi Novel... Indira

J.D. Chakravarthi... Dhileepan

Prakash Raj... Dr. Herold

Vikramsinghe

Nandita Das... Shyama

P.S. Keerthana... Amudha

Delhi Kumar... D. Ganesan

Master Suraj... Vinayan

Master Kethan... Akhilan

Mani Ratnam, on A PECK ON THE CHEEK (Kannathil Mthamittal):

Amudha, a 9-year-old Sri Lankan child, is told by her Indian parents that she is adopted. As she realises the significance of this revelation, she experiences a deep angst and innumerable questions arise in her mind. She understands that she belongs to a different set of parents and a different country altogether. This understanding is the beginning of her journey.

Through Amudha's eyes we see a ravaged Sri Lanka impacted by twenty years of struggle. An idyllic country that is torn apart by the sudden bursts of violence and terror. The cries of anguish and the agony of a tragedy.

Kannathil Muthamittal is about this adopted refugee child, her angst, her quest, her understanding and, finally, her hope.

Biographies

Mani Ratnam (Writer/Director/Producer) :

Mani Ratnam was born on June 2, 1955 at Madurai, South India. He is a commerce graduate from Madras University with a Masters in Business Administration from the Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management, Bombay. He was honored with the Prestigious “Padmashree Award” in 2002, by the President of India.

R. Madhavan (Thiruchelvan):

R. Madhavan was born on June 1, 1970. He got a Bachelors of Science degree in Electronics from Rajaram College in Kolhapur. He has acted in more than 1200 television episodes and more than ten films.

Simran (alias) Rishi Novel (Indira):

Rishi Novel was born on April 4, 1976. She has worked in over fifty feature films in a variety of languages, including Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu.

Nandita Das (Shyama):

Nandita Das received her Bachelor of Arts in Geography, at the Miranda House at Delhi University. She later completed an M.A. degree in Social Work at the Delhi School of Social Work at Delhi University. She has acted in dozens of films and has even directed two documentary films.

P.S. Keerthana (Amudha):

P.S. Keerthana was born on January 19, 1992. She is currently in grade school at La Chatline School in Chennai. KANNATHIL MUTHAMITTAL was her first feature film.

Producer:

Madras Talkies
5B, Ramachandra Avenue
Seethammal Colony 1st Main Road,
Alwarpet, Chennai – 600 018

Website: www.kannathil.com

US Distributor: Film Movement

EYE WEEKLY

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Our critics review over 90 films in our roundup of the Toronto International Film Festival

REVIEWS BY [JASON ANDERSON](#), [KIM LINEKIN](#), [ADAM NAYMAN](#), [INGRID RANDOJA](#) & [CATHARINE TUNNAcliffe](#) UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

A PECK ON THE CHEEK ★★★

Starring Prakash Raj, Nandita Das. Directed by Mani Ratnam. 123 min. Masters. Sep 8, 3pm, Varsity; Sep 11, 10pm, Varsity.

This lavish Indian comedy-drama is unsure of what it wants to be, but still manages to be charming and consistently entertaining. *A Peck on the Cheek* is a sweet, funny, fairy tale about the adopted daughter of loving parents who wants to find her real mother, even if it means running away from home. The structure is a little ungainly -- there's an ill-advised subplot about guerrilla fighters in Sri Lanka and an epic framing device set in the past that's underdeveloped. But the performers are expressive, and the cinematography is absolutely gorgeous. AN

San Francisco Chronicle

FILM CLIPS

Also opening Friday

[Mick LaSalle](#), [Jonathan Curiel](#), [Walter Addiego](#)
Friday, May 27, 2005

'A Peck on the Cheek'



Drama. Directed and written by Mani Ratnam. Starring Madhavan, Simran, P.S. Keerthana, Nandita Das, J.D. Chakravarthi and Prakash Raj. (In Tamil and Sinhala, with English subtitles. Not rated. 136 minutes. At the Balboa.)

In his native India, Mani Ratnam is heralded as one of the country's finest directors -- someone who consistently explores complex issues in dramatic settings -- and in "A Peck on the Cheek," we get Ratnam at his best, albeit with a few glitches.

The story revolves around a family that has an adopted girl named Amudha. The girl's birth mother, Shyama (Nandita Das, the great actress from "Fire" and other Indian movies), gave her away after fleeing the Tamil area of Sri Lanka, where separatists have waged a bloody campaign against the central government. After learning the truth about her adoption, the 9-year-old Amudha (P.S. Keerthana) persuades her parents (Madhavan and Simran) to search for her biological mother -- a journey that takes the well-off couple and their wide-eyed daughter through the minefield that is Sri Lanka.

What they witness is unnerving and edifying -- unnerving because they put themselves in the middle of a dangerous war, edifying because it makes them understand the pressures that Shyama faced when she relinquished her daughter. Ratnam conveys the conflicted feelings of Amudha and Shyama to great effect. Ratnam also conveys the stunning beauty of the island nation of Sri Lanka. (The film was shot in southern India, whose landscape mirrors that of Sri Lanka.) He even includes a few episodes of singing that lighten the film's atmosphere.

On the downside are several scenarios that seem entirely implausible. How is it, for example, that Amudha's family is the only one in a Sri Lankan park that happens to get surrounded by soldiers who then get into a major firefight with Tamil guerrillas? Also, audiences unfamiliar with the history of Sri Lanka will wish "A Peck on the Cheek" had a written prologue that explained who the Tamils are and why they're rebelling against the government. (The film's title apparently comes from a line by the Tamil poet Mahakavi Subramaniya Bharathiyar.)

Still, "A Peck on the Cheek" explores universal themes of displacement, struggle and family -- themes that will register whether an audience is in San Francisco or somewhere in Sri Lanka.

-- Advisory: Scenes of bloody warfare.

-- Jonathan Curiel



This is Mani Ratnam's latest [film](#) dealing in the themes of war and innocence trapped together. His last trilogy of [films](#); Roja (1991), Bombay (1993) & Dil Se... (1998), which had similar themes, was all about the war problems people faced in north India, with its sub-themes surrounding the topic of both the Hindu and Muslim religion and their differences. But for Kanathil Muthamittal Mani Ratnam goes closer to his home to examine what is become more of a bigger problem for Sri Lanka and its people.

Essentially Sri Lanka is divided into two parts. Each has their own culture, historical background & religion; the Sinhalese's and the Tamil's. Both had their major differences in the past that resulted in the segregation of many Tamil's from employment, education and government positions. As a result war broke out and the Tamil's continue their fight against the government.

Mani Ratnam is one of Indian cinema's top [director](#). If nothing good comes from him then it's a seriously worrying time for Indian cinema on the whole. While every single one of his films are dubbed or remade in Hindi for the wider Indian market (currently his previous Tamil film Alay Payuthey is being remade in Hindi as Saathiya), he has chosen this film not to be dubbed or remade for the Hindi audience as the themes and issues dealt with here are quite unconventional from normal Indian cinema.

What he does with this film is he looks at another country's problem, which is linked with India and its closeness due to its Tamil population. That itself is quite a rarity, as Indian cinema tends to be quite patriotic

about "Mother India!" The genius of this film is that it doesn't really say which side is good and which side is bad. Instead it just throws you into the situation and lets you see what is happening...through the eyes of an 8-year-old girl.

The film has much further context within its screenplay, from the wonderfully scripted five-minute short love story that is shown as a flashback, to the climax war scene that shows young children fighting against a trained army.

The film contains fine performances from the both South and North Indian actors that includes: Madhavan (Alay Pauthey), Simran (Tere Mere Sapne, PKS), Nandita Das (Aks, Fire) & J.D. Chakravarthy (Satya)...indeed a talented bunch. But the finest performance comes from [actress](#) P.S. Keerthana as the young child Amudha. It's a performance that does leave an impression on your mind; from her bratty-child expressions, to her eyes seeing war violence for the first time.

The technical aspects of the film is also very well done, despite this film being shot on a low budget. It stands with even Indian cinema's most expensive film to date Devdas (2002), and still looks better! The locations are real-like, [cinematography](#) is spell bounding and the [music](#) from A.R Rahman (of Bombay Dreams fame) is one that is melodious and helps with the narration of the film. I should also point out for the die-hard film buffs out there that this is India's first ever THX certificated film.

Some have argued that this is Mani Ratnam's weakest film. I sense that they have only viewed the surface and have not actually dwelled into the deep rims of what it offers through its screenplay and visual display. I would agree that this is not Ratnam's best work to date, but it is one of the best Indian films from the year 2000/2001.

My verdict on this film is quite obvious from my review, however if you want to experience a top world cinema title or you want to experience a top quality Indian film, then this is one title you view.

THE HINDU

"Kannathil Muththamittal"

MANI RATNAM has undoubtedly matured as a director since his earlier ``Bombay" and ``Iruvar". One saw distinct traces of this in his last work, ``Alaipayuthe".

His latest, ``Kannathil Muththamittal", (a hauntingly moving line from Bharati's poetry that roughly translates as ``A peck on the cheek?") confirms that he has even a better grip on the medium. Although the film may not have a flawless script (note, for instance, the way the officer talks to the children when one of them seeks information about her long lost mother), Ratnam has worked hard on characterisation.

Keerthana, as little girl Amudha, virtually carries the movie on her frail shoulders, and full credit for this to Ratnam. Any layman will tell you how difficult it is to handle children, and the few others who mastered this tricky art included Vittorio de Sica and Satyajit Ray. The pinnacle, so to say, of Keerthana's performance is the scene where she meets her biological mother, nine years after she abandoned her: Keerthana does not play to the galleries, rather, she subdues her raging emotions in a way that is splendidly convincing even for a diehard critic.

Unfortunately, Nandita Das as the mother -- whose nuances and emotions are wonderful at the beginning of the movie (at her marriage, for example, when one sees traces of sheer excellence) -- seems flat and uninspiring in this crucial shot that could have been dramatic without appearing

exaggerated and convoluted. One expected to see much more pain on her face when she meets her little girl after years.

Simran as the mother who raises Keerthana is surprisingly good, indicating that it needs a dedicated director to draw the best out of an artiste. To me, the weakest link in the entire film is Madhavan, who has really not been able to slip out of the mask he wore in ``Alaipayuthe''. Ratnam must think of newer actors. Ratnam himself deserves much praise for the remarkable way he has helmed ``Kannathil Muththamittal''. Yet, there are sequences which are rank amateurish. It was appalling to see the way he handles the events where Madhavan and his family are caught in the crossfire between Sri Lankan soldiers and rebels. Even the scene where Madhavan and his friend are trapped by militants is awfully disappointing.

What is more, Ratnam must not yield to the temptation of breaking his narrative with meaningless songs and unrealistic picture postcard settings. These look, at best, like some glossy advertisements that rob the very soul of the film.

Which is, otherwise, powerful dealing with a pressing issue like adoption. The dilemma which probably confronts every parent who has adopted a child has been picturised with feeling, and the movie examines the completely different ways Keerthana looks at her father (Madhavan) and her mother (Simran).

The story unfolds against the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis: Das abandons her new baby in an Indian Red Cross camp to fight a war in her country. The little girl (Keerthana) grows up blissfully till Madhavan and Simran decide to tell her the truth on her ninth birthday. An adamant Keerthana forces her parents to travel to Sri Lanka in search of a mother she has never seen, and whose kisses she longs for.

``Kannathil Muththamittal'' is now running in several Chennai theatres, and is certainly a must for those who still believe in meaningful cinema. - GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN



Kannathil Muthamittal (A Peck on the Cheek)

Mani Ratnam is one of the star directors of Tamil cinema and his 2002 film **Kannathil Muthamittal** (A Peck on the Cheek) is a fine example of his work and a perfectly accessible introduction to anyone who wishes to explore the colourful worlds of Indian or Tamil cinema who thinks that Bollywood musicals might not be quite to their taste.

Shyama and Dileepan are newly-weds, but when the civil war fighting in Sri Lanka takes a turn for the worse, Shyama is forced to leave as a refugee without her husband, who is reported as having been shot by rebels. Shyama has just discovered she is pregnant and in the refugee camp she gives birth to a baby girl. Nine years later in India, Amudha is told the truth of her origins by her adoptive parents Indra

and Thiru. The young girl of course wants to know her real mother and finds a way of returning to the still war-torn island of Sri Lanka.

The storyline is not in the least complex or even original and there are few surprises as the young Amudha – played with some degree of skill by the young actress P.S. Keerthana, as well as a little bit of sass that the character is obviously meant to possess – decides to take it upon herself to find her mother and eventually gets the support of her parents to take her there. Fortunately her adoptive father is a famous writer and her mother is a TV personality, both of whom are very understanding and resourceful parents. It's all a little too smooth and non-confrontational, but there is quite a bit of charm in the way the film presents the backstory of how it was in the adopting Amudha that Indra and Thiru came together to marry.

When the story arrives back in Sri Lanka however, the story quite unexpectedly takes a surprising turn. The civil war still continues and the film shows the effects of the war on the people of Sri Lanka – suicide bombers, bombed-out villages, guerrilla fighters prowling the forests and some quite striking **Black Hawk Down** style battle sequences. It never gets bogged down in the political issues however, but rather addresses the issues in a broader sense – as simply war – and even then it rather naively portrays this as a universal malaise for which international arms dealers are more to blame than religion or politics. That's not a criticism of the film however – the film make no pretence of being anything more than a voyage of discovery for a young girl and has no more to say about the specifics of a war situation than **The Sound of Music** had any anything to say about the Anschluss. It uses a real-world situation well, without getting distracted from the purpose of the film and maintains an effective sense of danger that I found quite surprising.

While expecting something more along the lines of a typical colourful and glamorous Bollywood musical, I found that **Kannathil Muthamittal** is actually a quite straightforward film, with only occasional musical interludes and most of the songs actually integrated into the film like a normal film soundtrack. Three of the songs however have their own sequences, but rather than being complexly choreographed dance routines they are actually filmed like glossy high production pop promo-videos and not integrated naturalistically into the film. While the cinematography is quite superb throughout the film, here the DoP pulls out all the stops with crane-shots, swooping cameras, helicopter fly-passes, and fast-paced editing techniques. I found this worked quite well and wouldn't be as jarring to western cinemagoers and most Bollywood or even Hollywood musicals.

Overall

Kannathil Muthamittal is my first experience of Tamil cinema and it defied all expectations, although perhaps it is a not typical example of Tamil filmmaking. It's a charming film with high production values, elegantly photographed scenery and features strong performances from all the principal actors. As an introduction into another world of cinema it is perfectly accessible and highly recommended.