Mouna Ragam

Mouna Ragam (English), also spelt Mouna Raagam, is a 1986 Indian Tamil-language romantic drama film written and directed by Mani Ratnam, and produced by G. Venkateswaran. The film narrates the life of Divya (Revathi), who is robbed of her carefree existence when she reluctantly marries Chandramouli (Mohan). Divya, mourning the shooting death of her former lover Manohar (Karthik), did not really want to marry. The story follows Divya's inner conflict between holding onto her past and coming to terms with the present and making a life with Chandramouli.

The film's development began when Ratnam began writing a short story, "Divya"; while the production of his first film, Paavai Avu Pallavi (1983) was delayed. He did not intend to film it, but after writing the story, realised that it had cinematic possibilities. "Divya" later developed into a film script with the same name, and was eventually renamed Mouna Ragam. Although Ratnam completed work on the script during Paavai Avu Pallavi, it did not begin production until after the release of his fourth film, Idhaya Kizhthu (1985). Mouna Ragam was the first film produced by Venkateswaran's Sujatha Films (later renamed GV Films), and was filmed primarily in Chennai, with additional filming in Delhi and Agra. The soundtrack album and background score were composed by Ilayaraja, with lyrics by Vaali. P. C. Sreeram was the film's cinematographer, and its art director was Thota Tharani. It was edited by B. Lenin and V. T. Vijayan.

Mouna Ragam was released on 15 August 1986, India's Independence Day. Despite a modest beginning, it became a box-office success, with a theatrical run of over 175 days, and a major breakthrough in Ratnam's career. The film received critical acclaim; it won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Tamil, and Ratnam received the Films Award for Best Tamil Director. The soundtrack by Ilayaraja has been regarded by critics as one of his greatest works. Mouna Ragam also became a landmark film in Karthik's career despite his role being a cameo. It was later dubbed in Telugu with the same title. The film was remade in Hindi in 1992 as Kazaak, and in Kannada in 1999 as Chandrindu.

Plot

Divya is a free-spirited college student from a conservative family whose strict father, Chandramouli, works for the government. She learns that her parents are eagerly awaiting a marriage proposal for her. Unwilling to get married, and hoping that the groom’s family will reject her, she deliberately arrives home late and completely dressed in rain, only to find Chandramouli (the groom) and his family patiently waiting for her. She talks arrogantly to Chandramouli to make him dislike her but, undeterred, he says that he likes her and agrees to the marriage. Divya initially refuses, but when her father has a heart attack she begs him to accept her proposal to aid his recovery. Succumbing to pressure, Divya marries Chandramouli.

After their marriage Chandramouli takes Divya to Ooty, but she cannot accept him as her husband and ignores him. When he asks her what she would like as a wedding gift, she says she wants a divorce. Startled, Chandramouli asks why; in a flashback, Divya remembers when she was in love with Manohar, whom she met as a college student. Manohar and his gang assault and rob the son of Thamizhman, an MP. Divya reports Manohar to the police, and he is arrested. She later learns that Thamizhman’s son had run away with Manohar, and Manohar stole the money to pay for the girl’s medical treatment. Divya feels guilty, and balls him out.

Manohar falls in love with Divya, and tries to win her love; although she initially rejects him, eventually she returns his feelings. At the same time he unable to accept her marriage, Divya finds herself finally free from her mental baggage and depressed state. She begins to appreciate her situation and make the most of it. Conversely, Chandramouli is wary of her as he fears what would happen at the end of the year when their divorce would be approved. Troubled, he distances himself from her and rejects her every move. At the same time he slowly begins falling in love with her while denying his feelings to himself.

Chandramouli is attacked by his company’s boss because he had suspended their union leader. Divya brings him to a nearby hospital, where he survives after receiving treatment. After he is discharged from the hospital, Divya takes care of him and realises that she has fallen in love with him. She tries to show it by wearing the anklets Chandramouli gave her shortly after their marriage but before she could do this, Chandramouli

Cast

- Mohan as Chandramouli
- Revathi as Divya
- Karthik as Manohar
- J. V. Ramaprasad as Chandramouli’s boss
- R. Sankaran as Chandramouli
- Bhavani as Divya’s brother
- Shankara as the lawyer
- Vani as Divya’s mother
- Kalaiselvi as Divya’s sister
- Sonia as Divya’s sister

Production

Development

When the last schedule for Mani Ratnam's first film Paavai Avu Pallavi (1983) was delayed inordinately, he began work on a story entitled ‘Divya’—which eventually became Mouna Ragam. His fifth film. Ratnam said he began Divya as a short story about a couple’s wedding night. He did not originally plan to film it, but after writing the story he realised that it had cinematic possibilities. Ratnam took a one-month break from Paavai Avu Pallavi, and wrote the script for Divya. The new title Mouna Ragam was derived from the song ‘Naan Paadum Mouna Ragam’, from Ratnam’s fourth film, Idhaya Kizhthu (1985). Ratnam said that due to budgetary constraints, it would have been easier to send the female lead to Angaamay, instead of Delhi, but he did not want her to be easily return to her parents because she could not adjust to her husband.

Mouna Ragam was Ratnam’s first collaboration with cinematographer P. C. Sreeram. He initially narrated the script of Mouna Ragam (when it was titled Divya) to Malayalam film producer N. John, but the latter wanted a political film, which eventually became the Malayalam-language film, Shankar (1984), also directed by Ratnam. He then pitched Divya to G. Thirayagan of Sathyu Jodhi Films but Thirayagan wanted an action film, and Ratnam made Pagal (1985) with him. Koovathilambani of Motherland Pictures too rejected Divya, saying it was not so kind of film Motherland would produce, and Ratnam instead made Idhaya Kizhthu with them. The film was eventually picked up by Ratnam’s brother, G. Venkateswaran, under his Sujatha Films banner (later renamed GV Films). It was the company’s first film production; until then, it had been involved in distribution and finance. The film was edited by B. Lenin and V. T. Vijayan, with art direction by Thota Tharani.

Casting

Ratnam cast his Idaya Kizhthu heroine Meena as the male lead Chandramouli, and Pagal Asha heroine Revathi as the female lead Divya. He initially had someone like Arun Nag and Supriya Pathak in mind when he finished writing Mouna Ragam. Between finishing the story and making the film, he decided to include Revathi, whose performance in Meena Vaazha (1983) impressed him. Nadiya claimed she was also considered for the role, but declined due to priority commitments. R. Sankaran was cast as Divya’s father, Chandramouli Kangacha as the lawyer, and J. V. Ramaprasad as Chandramouli’s boss. Vani plays Divya’s mother and Bhaskar her brother; Kalaiselvi and Sonia play her sisters.

Idaya Kizhthu, who became a successful Indian cinematic choreographer, made his acting debut in the film with an appearance in "Palkivizhin Ivan" as a boy playing a flute. According to Ratnam, the only difference between Divya and Mouna Ragam was the inclusion of Kangacha’s character Manohar, which was not part of the earlier screenplay. Divya, the story of a young woman settling into an arranged marriage, did not explore her life before the marriage; it just dealt with an arranged marriage—a two strangers suddenly thrown together—and how they adjust. Ratnam realised that the story needed to satisfy a wider audience, and decided to give them something that would make them accept the character without questioning Divya’s actions. He originally resisted this, but reconsidered because its sufficiency provided a clear rationale for Divya’s resistance to the arranged marriage. Karthik said he was a last-minute addition to the cast, and described his role as a cameo.
Filming

Although Ratnam began work on the script of Mouna Ragam while making Pasanga, he did not begin production until July 1988. In September 1988, Ratnam began shooting the film at Shri Sai Studios in Parel, Mumbai. He began shooting in October and wrapped up the film by December 1988. The film was released on 24 February 1989.

Themes and influences

Mouna Ragam provides insights into the issues faced by married couples, exploring the plights and perceptions of divorce and how societies need to view the desires of women. Film critic Baradwaj Rangan, while comparing it to Nenjil Thunai (1988), another story of a woman torn between the man she loves and the man she marries, said that Mouna Ragam is a film that focuses on Divya's character, her journey of self-discovery, and her choice to seek out happiness in her own way.

Critical response

At the 36th Filmfare Awards South, Mouna Ragam won the award for Best Feature Film in Tamil. A decade later, he praised the film's realistic portrayal of urban Tamil people and its exploration of the themes of love, marriage, and urban life. P. C. Sreeram's cinematography and Ilaiyaraaja's music were also praised for their atmospheric portrayal of the film's settings.

Legacy

Mouna Ragam emerged as a milestone in Tamil cinema and Mani Ratnam's breakthrough film. It has been acclaimed for its box-office success with elements of art film. The film introduced techniques such as soft-focus shots, close-ups, and slow-motion sequences. Mouna Ragam is considered a turning point in Tamil cinema, establishing Ratnam as a prominent figure in the industry.

In popular culture

A scene in Mouna Ragam when Manohar tries to declare his love for Divya through the college internom in response to her challenge, was parodied in Thaandavam (2010), with Dhivy and Disha Pandey. Rangan compared Mouna Ragam to the Hindi film Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam (1999), in both films "the despondent wife was tempted, at several points, to snap free of matrimony, but what held her back, even was the innate decency of the lead role."
man she married, "Divya was recreated by a "moody yet jovial" character in Mouna Ragam because it also features a woman (Chaya Singh) reluctantly married to a man (B. Prakash) whom she does not love, Pavithra Sriwasan of Rediff.com called it "a dull reworking of Mouna Ragam: Neelima Menon of The New Indian Express called "Pratyaksha Sradhakku" (2000) a "watered-down version" of Mouna Ragam. Actress Sri Divya called Revathi's character her "all-time favorite role", saying that she played a similar role in Malashree (Revathy's Srimadth Devi). Actor Karthi said that his character in Naan Mahaan Alla (2010) was similar to Karthik's "moody yet jovial" character in Mouna Ragam Writing for Mint, Nandini Ramnath compared "Poo" Words Manjhi (2011) to Mouna Ragam because of the similar relationship between their male and female leads. The Hindu's S. Shiva Kumar wrote in his review of Rail Ne Rana (2008), "A corefree and cheerful girl whose boyfriend dies on the day of the wedding is forced to marry a staid suitor by the father who suffers a heart attack. The similarity [with Mouna Ragam] ends there." The Kannada film Adiga (2007), which had the theme of marital problems, too was compared with Mouna Ragam.

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