

organized by
Film Society of Bhubaneswar



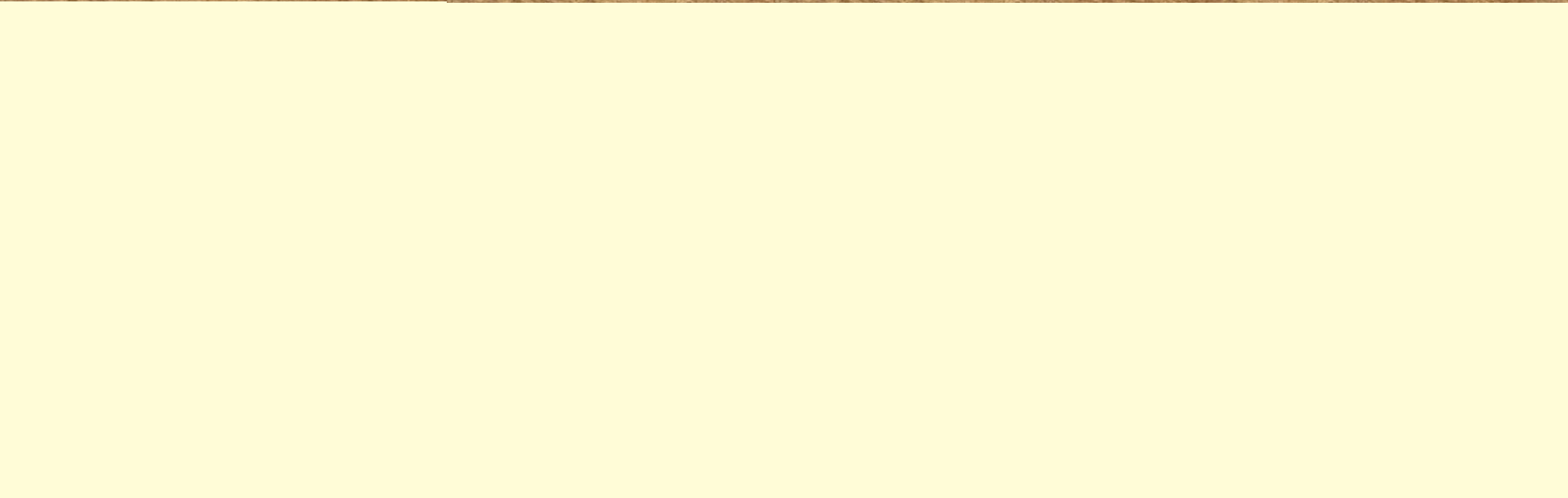
9th INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL BHUBANESWAR

IFFb



14th – 20th February





celebrating indian cinema



Indian Cinema Today

Indian Cinema, as a term, is misleading in the singular, it is to mistake it for a search of a singular, rather than exploring the multitudes that exist in the diversity of the 1.3 billion people. The question is of increased importance today, with increased vehemence since 2014, the imposition of a 'singular' national culture, emanating from a very constricted reading of nation and its culture. Every year we have remarkable films made in various Indian languages. They are generally called regional cinema but we think that together they actually give Indian cinema its own distinct identity.

Film festival curatorial exercise is an effort to give expression to a dynamic imagination of 'national' cinema. The 'national' is a contested terrain. Developments in Cinema are significant sites of this contestation. To savour the taste of Indian Cinema, it has to be found in also considering and engaging with films from the often overlooked areas like the North East, the many languages of that region and their histories, conflicts and storytelling traditions.

We at FSB (Film Society of Bhubaneswar), endeavour to share with our audiences, the multitudinous nature of stories from across the country, its varied tapestry of traditions and bring to the audience's fold the warp and weft of the magic of the cinematic form. The festival aims to interrogate the contours of Indian Cinema and what such a framing enables in the present. The task in front of us, then, is not to search for a quick answer to the question "what is Indian Cinema?" but to make sure the question is never foreclosed.

The festival aims at screening films released in India over the last couple of years, material which is generally not circulated in the organised distri-

bution networks. We have a selection of around thirty outstanding works of cinema from the North East: Bodo, Manipuri, Arunachali (Wancho) and Assamese languages, from South: Malayalam, Kannada and Tamil, from West: Marathi, North: Hindi and Punjabi, East: Bengali and Oriya, a fairly representative mix of the Indian Cinematic imagination. Together the films present an intimate and insightful portrayal of India in its diversity of regions and cultures, its people and their lives, hopes and aspirations, struggles and possibilities.

The films featuring in the festival are recipients of critical acclaim and honour at both national and international level for their artistic merit and socio-cultural relevance. They engage with and depict in meaningful, thought provoking manner significant contemporary concerns such as social reality, questions of caste and gender inequality, ecology and environment, political and economic change.

There will be a retrospective of noted Malayalam film maker G Aravindan. The retrospective is made possible by the support of Kerala Chalachitra Academy (State Government of Kerala) and National Film Archives (Government of India) for sourcing of films. There will be workshops and masterclasses for students with noted film makers. The festival hopes to encourage young filmmakers to make work from the eastern part of the country by providing mentoring opportunities with master film makers.

About Film Society of Bhubaneswar

FSB (Film Society of Bhubaneswar) has been in existence since 2004. FSB has focused on creating cinema literacy among its members, screened over 500 films from across the world, conducted master classes with leading visual artists nationally and internationally. It has organized 8 festivals over the last decade covering World Cinema (2012), Asian & African Cinema (2007), Journeys and Migration (2010), Short films (2011). It has curated retrospectives on World Cinema (2005), German Cinema (2007), Spanish Cinema (2008), Into the Darkness (2009) & Yasujiro Ozu (2012).

Unlike the other major cities of India, Bhubaneswar does not have a proper film festival in the cultural calendar. Despite all obstacles, FSB has managed to organize 8 film festivals and 10 major retrospectives, masterclasses, talks with visual artists and film makers, with the continuing effort to take Cinema to newer audiences, cineastes and students.

About the Logo

The festival logo is inspired by 'Nabagunjara', meaning 'Naba' nine and 'Gunjara' sound, is depicted in traditional patachitra painting as a composite figure of nine animals. The images of this creature is found in the paintings of the Himalayan Princely states and of South India, the written version of the story of Nabagunjara is found only in the Sarala Das (15th century) Oriya Mahabharata. Lord Krishna is revealed to Arjuna in nabagunjara form, to test his devotee. The depiction of the creature is found in the Jagannath temple, Puri. The creature is found in Ganjifa cards, it is the king card and Arjuna is the minister card.

In the Nabagunjara, Krishna expresses the plurality of approaches to and the understanding of reality. Ultimate reality, Krishna teaches Arjuna is one, but it appears different to different people depending on their point of view and their own innate svabhava or nature. The Hindu tradition is neither monolithic nor unitarian, but instead plural and multifaceted, where multiplicity rather than uniformity is the watchword and, therefore, approaches to this reality have also to be varied.

Therefore we think this symbol of plurality could be a way to define the composite art of cinema. Nabangunjara not only represents the essence of acceptance and diversity but also a representation of different perspectives that cinema throws light on and through. The entire idea of several animals unified through an eternal soul somewhere or the other shows the unpredictable nature of cinema that keeps exploring and surprising the human mind through sight and sound.

Signature Film

Remembering Muybridge

The festival film is a homage to the first 24 frames in the history of cinema. Eadward Muybridge's experiments with photography, created newer ways of looking at images, in essence transformed visual culture. Nabagunjara is about the potential of transformation...



Concept, Director Sankalp Mohanty **Chief Animator** Pratyush Kumar Satpathy
Graphic Designer Harekrushna Jena **Music** Kisaloy Roy **Sound Design** Prateek Misra

c o n t
e n t s



1.	Indian Cinema Today	
2.	Convenor's Message	
3.	About Film Society of Bhubaneswar	
4.	About the logo and the Signature Film	
5.	Festival Films	08-41
6.	In memory of	42-43
	Nirad N Mohapatra B. Surya Pratap	
7.	Retrospective G.Aravindan	44-71
	i. Filmography	45
	ii. Film Details	46-52
	iii. G. Aravindan : Always a contemporary By C. S Venkiteswaran	53-54
	iv. The Poet of Revelations By Chandradasan	55-70
8.	Young Filmmakers	70-77
9.	John Abraham	78-83
	i. Filmography	78
	ii. Film Details	79
	iii. John about John By John Abraham	80-82
	iv. Remembering John By Adoor Gopalakrishnan	82-83
10.	Representation of Muslims in Bengali Cinema By Nadira Khatun	84-85
11.	Index	88-89
12.	Organizing team	90
13.	Our sponsors	91-

A man wearing a white turban and a white tunic is walking barefoot on a dirt path that runs between two agricultural fields. The field on the left is filled with rows of young green plants, while the field on the right is dark, tilled soil. In the background, there are scattered trees and a hazy horizon under a clear sky. The text "Opening Film" is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

Opening Film



Gaali Beeja

(Wind Seed) 95 mins | Kannada |

2015

Gaalibeeja, which literally translated into English means 'Wind Seed'. Gaalibeeja is a visually arresting meditation on cinema and modernity. The road is the central protagonist of the film connecting the various characters. The film opens with Prakash, a civil engineer, leaving for a road widening project in an unnamed village. His encounters along the way—a peddler of pirated DVDs who hands him a set of road movies, a farmer at a highway bus stop, and a poster sticker on his bicycle—form the backbone of this idiosyncratic film. While the paths of these diverse characters intersect and interrupt one another, it becomes clear that they each live in a vastly different time and space—one that is shaped by class and access to progress. While paying homage to the likes of Wim Wenders, Jim Jarmusch, and Abbas Kiarostami, Prasad blends social critique with exquisite cinematic form in his take on the "road movie." The film presents a fragmented narrative through images and soundscapes. The road carries us, connects us, it equally disrupts lives. The film explores this ambivalence and the different temporalities people inhabit.



Babu Eshwar Prasad completed BFA (Painting) from Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, Bangalore and MFA (Graphics) from M.S.University, Baroda and has held exhibitions since 1996 regularly. Working across media Prasad has been making short videos since 1997 – Gaalibeeja is his debut feature film, entirely self-financed, and is an exploration of the medium of cinema by a contemporary artist.

print source : babues@gmail.com

Written and Directed Babu Eshwar Prasad, **Camera** B R Viswanath
Editor M N Swam **Music** Marcus Maeder **Cast** Venkatesh Prasad, Amaresh Bijjal, Mohammed Rizwan, Bhanu Prakash Chandra, Divya Murthy



MAMI (Mumbai Film Festival) 2015,
Bengaluru International Film Festival,
San Francisco International South Asian Film Festival



Nilanjan Datta is a graduate of Film Editing from Film & Television Institute of India, Pune. Before making 'The Head Hunter', his first feature film, Nilanjan has made short fiction films and documentary films. He has also been awarded the National Award for his documentary film 'Bhanga Gara' in the year 2009. Presently he is Professor of Film Editing and Academic Coordinator at FTII, Pune.

print source: nilanjandatta@splashfilms.com

The Head Hunter

108 min | Wancho

2015

The film is about an old tribal man from a forgotten tribe of India. He belongs to the North Eastern tribe of India called the 'Wancho tribe,' dreaded for their practice of head hunting. When the government decides to develop the Old man's forest, he resists. A young official, who belongs to the same tribe as the Old man and also speaks his language, befriends him and tricks him to spend a few days in the city. When the old man finally comes back, everything has changed forever.

Screenplay and Direction Nilanjan Datta **Cinematography** Maulshri Singh
Associate Director & Editor Navnita Sen Datta
Sound, Design & Mix Anmol Bhawe **Cast** Nokshaa Saham, Mrigendra Narayan Konwar



Indian National Film Award (2016)
 Aravindan Puskaram (2016)
 Canada International Film Festival



Sanjib has been working in various capacities in Mumbai Film & Television industry for more than a decade now. He started his career under Sunil Ghosh, a veteran ad-filmmaker and a FTII-Pune alumnus. He has also had a stint at the ZEE group.

print source: sanjib.sekhar.dey@gmail.com

III Smoking Barrels

127 min | Hindi, English, Bengali, Assamese, Manipuri, Nagamese | 2017

The film is an anthology of three stories from Far East India, each exploring a different stage of human life. The first story is about a child, involved in armed conflict. The next story is about a boy, a drug peddler, and his journey into the drug world. The third story is about a man, an elephant poacher, who ends up killing 15 elephants to fend for himself and his young wife. The movie was filmed over two years in various politically sensitive areas of North-East.

Writer-Director Sanjib Dey **Producer** Amit Malpani **Original Score** Anurag Saikia, Michele Josia **Cast** Indraneil Sengupta, Subrat Dutta, Mandakini Goswami, Amrita Chattopadhyay



38th Durban International Film Festival 2017, South Africa
22nd International Film Festival of Kerala
66th International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg, Germany



Capital I

86 mins | Odia

2014

Capital I is an existential psychodrama revolving around a mysterious and unknown artist and depicting the transformation of mind of a young girl whereby she finds herself trapped in between realistic relationship and attractions and a strange relationship with her hallucinatory lesbian partner.



About the director: Amartya Bhattacharyya, a 30-year-old artist from eastern India. Capital I is his debut feature film. Amartya bagged the prestigious National award at the 63rd National Film Awards for the Best Cinematography for his documentary 'Benaras – the unexplored attachments'.

print source: swastikchoudhury@gmail.com +91 91784 5795 9

Director Amartya Bhattacharyya **Producer(s)** Susant Misra and Swastik Choudhury **Music** Kisaloy Roy **Cast** Susant Misra, Pallavi Priyadarshini, Ipsita Mohanty and others



Festival du Film d'Asie du Sud Transgressif
International Film Festival of Kerala
West Florida Film Festival



Born in the southern Kerala town of Kottarakkara in 1965. Active in the film society movement from high school years onwards. Having completed Master's degree in Philosophy from Kerala University in 1989, turned to journalism for a while. Worked as an editor, columnist and film critic in different publications and finally returned to the screen as a script writer and associate for documentaries and television shorts.

Mundrothuruth (Munroe Island - 2015) is debut feature film.

print source: manumanushya@gmail.com

Munroe Island

92 mins | Malayalam

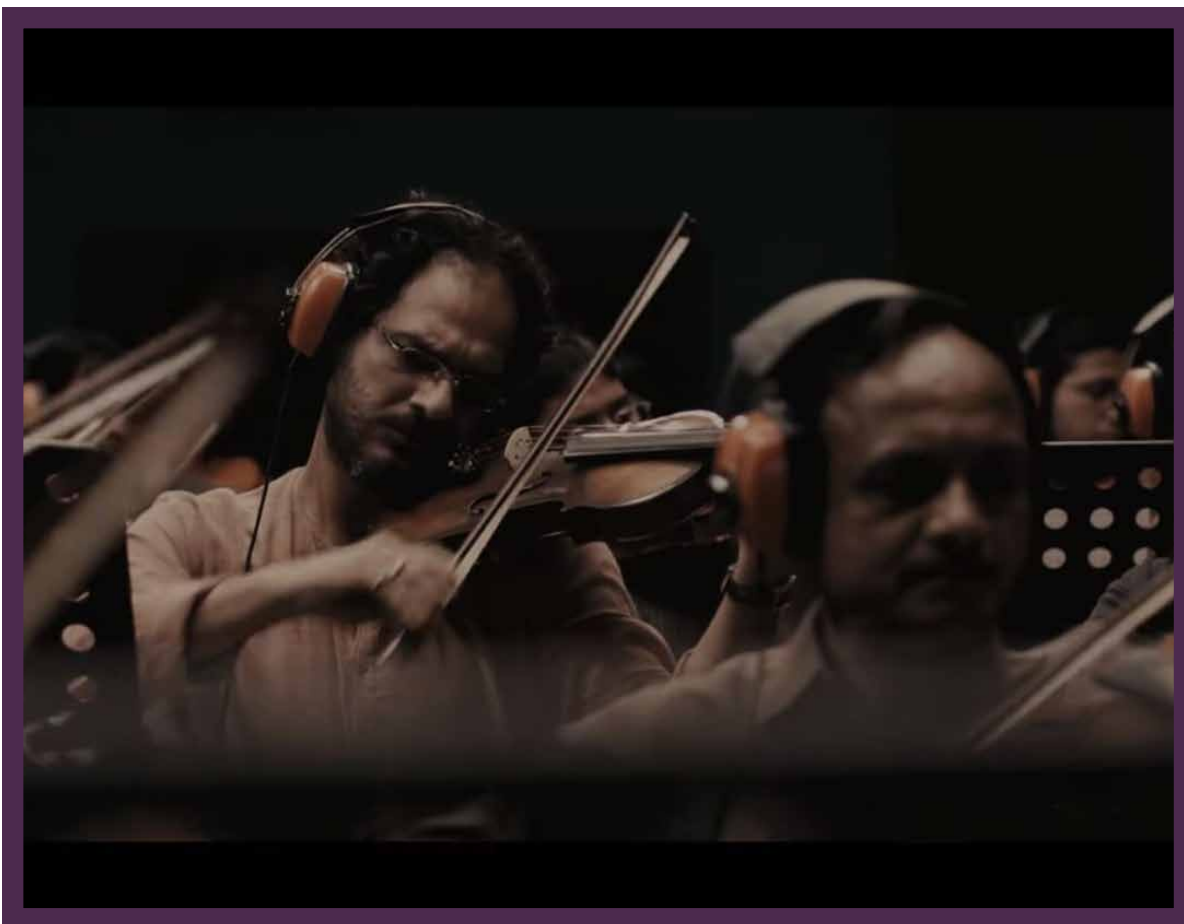
2015

It is a film washed in the deep green waters of the sea off Kerala, about lives that are moored and can never be moored on a small isle in Kollam. There is a lovely, old house on that island: its rooms festooned a bit too perfectly with curios. An earthen pot is on the table, the sardines are cooked, the toddy jug is full. An old man is waiting for his wayward grandson Keshu. He hasn't been here for over a decade. And now he is coming home, carrying memories and troubles. Keshu's father wants to take him to NIMHANS for counselling; his grandfather will have none of it. The island will cure him of his restlessness. The water that laps on the land in an antique rhythm, the blood that ties them together: could there be a greater chord, a more beautiful leash? Munroe Island (or Mundrothuruth, as it is called in Malayalam) is about about troubled men in a perfect home with an attractive, largely silent maid Kathu.

Producer, Director, Writer Manu PS **Cast** Jason Chacko Indrans, Alencier Ley Lopez, Anil Nedumangad, Abhija Sivakala



International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK)



Bauddhayan Mukherji is a writer and director, known for Teenkahon (2014), The Violin Player(2016) and Patalghar (2003). He is the winner of Silver Lion at Cannes for Bell Bajao and FCCI Award for the Best Indian Film at ALIIFF-2016.

print source: sambhav@litttelambfilms.com +91 99677 0674 5

The Violin Player

72 mins | Hindi

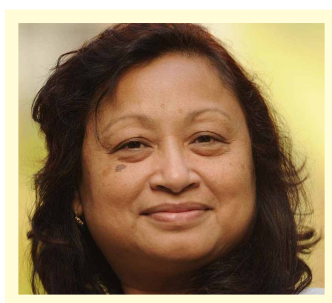
2014

It is the story of one day in the life of a failed Bollywood session violinist whose life revolves around remarkable nothingness. Life, that day, throws a carrot at him and he ends up finding expression in an unlikely place. The day unfolds to reveal startling truths about music, art, life and survival. One day, one stranger, one request, one life changing moment that makes everything pale into insignificance – this is what The Violin Player is all about.

Directed and written Bauddhayan Mukherjee **Music** Arnab Chakraborty and Bhaskar Dutta **Produced** Kedhhar Barrve and Monalisa Mukherjee **Editor** Arghakamal Mitra **Cinematographer** Avik Mukhopadhyay **Cast** Adil Hussain, Ritwik Chakravarthy, Nayani Dixit, Jayant Gadekar, Sonam Stobgais.



Zurich Film Festival, Switzerland
Sao Paulo International Film Festival, Brazil
Cork Film Festival, Ireland



Manju Borah is an Assamese filmmaker whose films explore the regions culture and its impact on the person and society as a whole. She is a recipient of Jurys Special Mention in the 47th National Film Festival, Gollapudi Srinivas Award for Best Debut Director, the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film, Best Director Award in 2nd Ladakh International Film Festival, Silver Gateway of India Special Jury Award in 15th Mumbai Film Festival and Best Film Award in 6th Bengaluru International Film Festival, 2013.

print source: manjupatraborah@gmail.com

Song of the Horned Owl

78 mins | Bodo

2015

According to a myth in Bodo community, exploited man after death transforms into a horned owl (Hudu) and comes back to his/her home and keeps calling from a tree. The film takes this myth and uses it as a metaphor to intensify the thematic development. The film explores the social and political upheavals of the indigenous Bodo community post the Second World War. Close to 40,000 people have lost their lives to communal violence and insurgency over the past 35 years in the northeast regions of India, many of the victims entirely innocent bystanders. Raimali, a young rape victim, knows this firsthand. As she lies in an abandoned house, she recalls how separatist violence has marked her life, that of her lover and their families, contrasting its disruption with indigenous folklore and the immutability of the Assamese landscape.

Director Manju Borah **Producer** Shankar Lal Goenka **Screenplay** Manju Borah
Cinematographer Sudheer Palsane **Editor** A. Sreekar Prasad **Music** Aniruddha Borah **Cast** Reshma Mushahary, Ahalya Daimary, Nita Basumatary



MAMI
IFFK
Montreal World Film festival



Gurvinder is an alumnus of Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune and has been travelling extensively through Punjab between 2002 and 2006, living and wandering with folk itinerants, documenting folk ballads and oral narratives.

print source: guruvindharsingh@gmail.com

Chauthi Koot

(The Fourth Direction) 115 mins | Punjabi
2016

The film plot synthesises two different stories set in a post-Operation Blue Star Punjab in the '80s. Fear and paranoia pervade the atmosphere as the general public is caught between excesses of both Khalistani militants and the Indian government forces fighting them. The first story is about a militant diktat in Punjab that prohibited family-owned dogs from barking, and the other is about two Hindu friends travelling to Amritsar in a nearly empty train. The film merges the two plots into one by making one of the friends travelling in the train recount the first story.

Director Gurvinder Singh **Producer** Kartikeya Narayan Singh **Writer** Waryarn Singh Sandhu and Gurvinder Singh **Cinematographer** Satya Rai Nagpaul **Editor** Bhupesh 'Micky' Sharma **Music** Marc Marder **Cast** Suvinder Vicky, Rajbir Kaur, Kanwaljit Singh, Harnek Aulakh, Gurpreet Bhangu



Cannes Film Festival 2015, Un Certain Regard Award
Asia Pacific Screen Award
National Film Awards, India

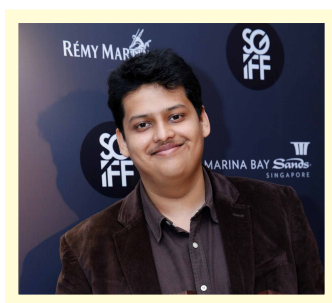


Court

116 mins | Marathi

2014

A sewage worker's dead body is found inside a manhole in Mumbai. An ageing folk singer is arrested and accused of performing an inflammatory song, which may have incited the worker to commit suicide. The trial unfolds in a lower court, where the hopes and dreams of the city's ordinary people play out. Forging these fates are the lawyers and judge, who are observed in their personal lives beyond the theatre of the courtroom.



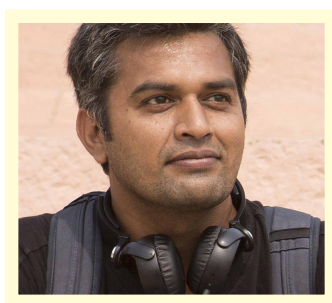
Chaitanya Tamhane is a 30 year old filmmaker, whose works include the short film Six Strands, which is a beautiful documentary on a lonely tea garden owner of Darjeeling.

print source: tamhane.chaitanya@gmail.com

Directed Chaitanya Tamhane **Produced** Vivek Gumber **Cinematographer** Mrinal Desai **Editor** Rikhav Desai **Music** Sambhaji Bhagat **Cast** Vira Sathidar, Vivek Gumber, Geetanjali Kulkarni, Pradeep Joshi, Usha Bane, Shirish Pawar-Pradeep Joshi



Venice International Film Festival (Orizzonti):
Mumbai Film Festival (International competition): (Best Film, Best Director) ·
Vienna International Film Festival (FIPRESCI)



Neeraj Ghaywan is an Indian film director who had assisted Anurag Kashyap in the direction of “Ugly” and “Gangs of Wasseypur”.

Masaan

109 mins | Hindi

2015

Four lives intersect along the Ganges: a low caste boy hopelessly in love, a daughter ridden with guilt of a sexual encounter ending in a tragedy, a hapless father with fading morality, and a spirited child yearning for a family, all longing to escape the moral constructs of a small-town. It is a story of the celebration of life, death and everything in between. The spirit of the film, the melancholy and the grief in the heart of it can be summarized by one of the dialogues;” Yeh dukh kaahe khatam nahi hota?”Why does this sadness never end?”

Director Neeraj Ghaywan **Producer(s)** Drishyam Films, Phantom Films, Macassar Productions, Sikhya Entertainment **Writer** Varun Grover **Cinematographer** Avinash Arun Dhaware **Editor** Nitin Baid **Music** Indian Ocean **Cast** Richa Chadda, Vicky Kaushal, Sanjay Mishra, Shree Dhar Dubey



Cannes, Un Certain Regard Avenir Prize
Indira Gandhi Award for Best First Film of a Director
Filmfare Award for Best Debut Director



Turup

(Checkmate) 72 mins | Hindi

2017

In the neighbourhood, chess is a popular pass time with roadside games bringing together men from different strata. Their pawns include morality and religion, causing social and political tensions to erupt when a tournament gets underway. But the men are only the most visible players. Against this simmering backdrop, a domestic worker with a secret hobby, a young woman in love and a former journalist struggling with married life must make their moves with care. When caste, class, religion and gender come into play, there are boundaries to be negotiated, and the very rules of the game stand challenged.

ektara
collective

Ektara Collective is an independent, autonomous, non-funded group of people who seek to combine creative efforts and imagination and collaborate with trained and untrained people to make films that are content wise and aesthetically located in people's subjective, contextual realities and experiences. Through this process, Ektara has made and produced 2 short fiction films earlier (Chanda Ke Joote, Jaadui Machchi). This is their first fiction feature film.

print source: ektaracollective@gmail.com

Producer and Direction: Ektara Collective **Story, Script, Screenplay:** Rinchin and Maheen Mirza **Cinematographer:** Maheen Mirza **Editing:** Puloma Pal **Production Design:** Sanjay Raraiya, Priyanka Gaikwad, Tina Sharma **Sound Design:** Bigyna Bhushan Dahal **Music:** Dev Narayan Saroliya, Kaluram Bamniya, Narayanji Delmia, Sangeeta Lahiri Shrivastav **Cast:** Mouliina Midde, Anil Singh, Madhu Bhagat, Syed Saim Ali, Nidhi Qazi, Hariram Darshyamkar



Jayaraj Rajasekharan Nair, often credited as Jayaraj, is an Indian filmmaker who has marked his presence in art house films as well as mainstream films. Director of over 35 films, in four languages (Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi), Jayaraj and his films has been critically acclaimed and won awards.

print source: jayarajfilms@yahoo.com

Ottaal

(The Trap) 82 mins | Malayalam

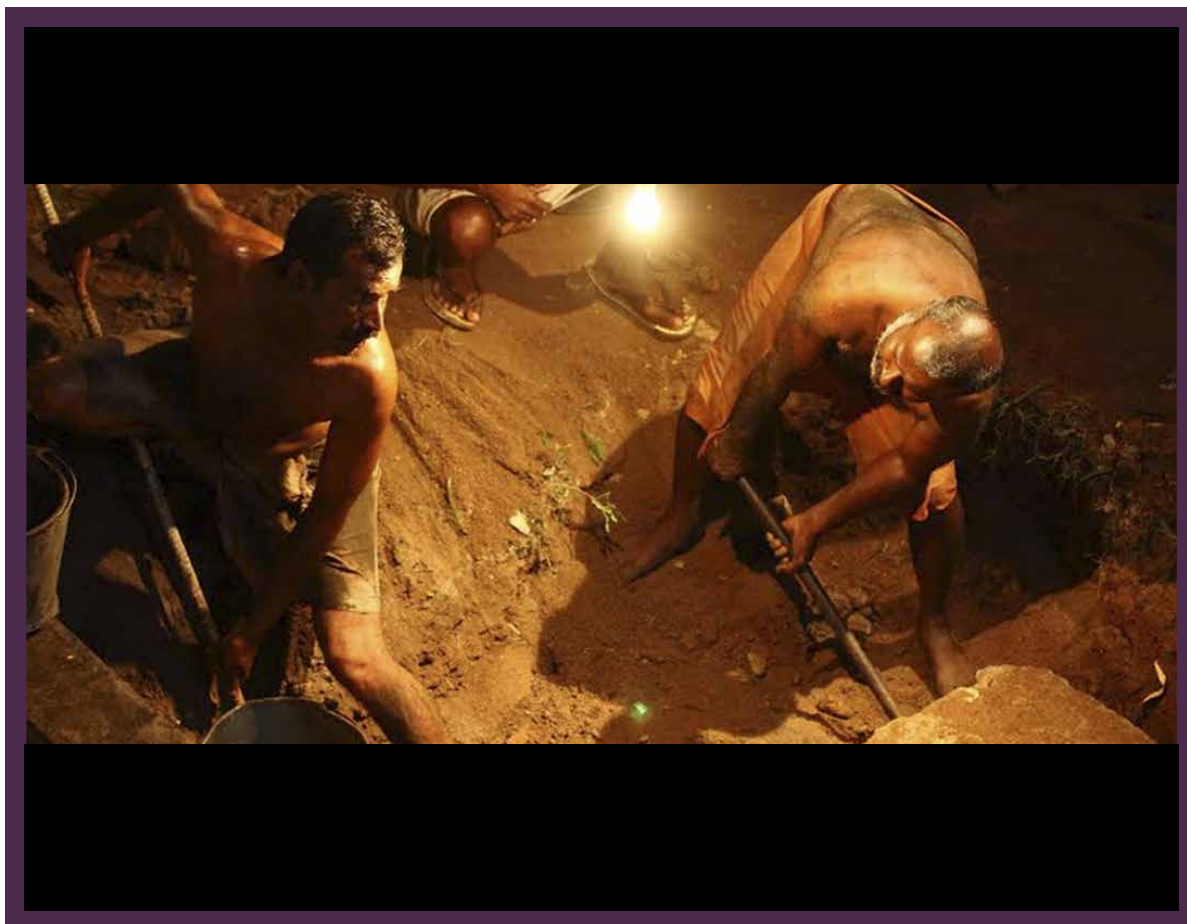
2014

Ottaal (The Trap) is an adaptation of one of Anton Chekhov's timeless works, Vanka. A story of the 18th century, but one that has travelled the time and space to be retold in the present day at a small village in the South of India.

Direction Jayaraj Rajasekharan **Scriptwriters** Joshy Mangalath, Jayaraj R
Cinematographer M J Radhakrishnan **Editor** B Ajithkumar **Music** Sreevalsan J
Menon, Kavalam Narayana Panicker **Sound designer and mixer** Sinoy Joseph,
Radhakrishnan S **Cast:** Vasudevan Kumarakom, Ashanth K Sha, Shine Tom
Chacko, Sabitha Jayaraj



IFFK



Ms. Vidhu Vincent is a well known documentary maker and writer from Kerala. She is a journalist by profession. Manhole is the first movie she has directed. Short Fiction.

print source: vidhuv@gmail.com

Manhole

85 mins | Malayalam

2016

Shalini is the daughter of Ayya Swami, manual scavenger, and Pappathi who is a housemaid. She tries to hide her caste background to avoid social exclusion among her friends in the school. She tries to pressure her father to give up the work he is doing, but fails as his vocational options are circumscribed by his caste identity. Her father's death in an accident while he was working in the manhole reveals her identity to her friends. She finds it hard to face social antipathy towards her because of her family's social and caste background. After the death of her father, the burden of running the family falls on her mother. Shalini also starts to work in the local super market as a shop floor assistant. She manages to pass the entrance exam to do a graduate course in Law. Her friend Marimuth, also engaged in manual scavenging to support his studies, faces the same fate as her father while doing his final year. It shakes her faith in the course she has followed in life and she decides to fight against the no exit situation in which those engaged in scavenging are caught in.

Director: Vidhu Vincent **Producer:** Vincent M P **Story, Screenplay:** Umesh Omanakuttan **Cinematographer:** Saji Kumar **Editor:** Appu Bhattathiri **Music Director:** Sidhartha Pradeep **Cast:** Rincy, Ravikumar, Shylaja, Suni, Baiju, Gouri, Saji Thulasidas, Mini



IFFK



Neend

15 mins | Hindi

2017

Anuradha puts sleepless people to sleep with the magic of her beautiful voice, except one man Tanmay, an old acquaintance who hasn't slept in twenty years. When all her attempts to put him to sleep fail, she searches for answers, realizing that the only way left, perhaps, is to examine past. Neend is a poetical, a quiet and meditative chamber piece designed around poetry, that unfolds in layers, beginning one night and ending in the next. The narrative is infused with glimpses of Anuradha's solitary life, her reminiscences, her poetry, and conversations with Tanmay, leading up to a quietly surprising and metaphorical ending. Genre-wise, it can be seen as a 'poetical', a variation on the musical genre. The film was born out of a mutual love for poetry shared between the director and lead actress Ms Deepti Naval.

Subhajit divides his time between earning his living as a hardware engineer in Bangalore and pursuing his passion for cinema by making independent short films. His second short film titled CHIMES, made in 2015, won a few accolades and was screened in several film festivals, both in India and abroad. NEEND is his third venture. He loves writing and making films that deal with human relationships and considers Satyajit Ray and Woody Allen as his biggest inspiration.

print source: subhajit.dasgupta74@gmail.com

Director: Subhajit Dasgupta **Story:** Subhajit Dasgupta, Sandeep Shikhar **Cinematographer:** Shreya Dev Dube **Editor:** Maloy Laha **Music by:** Mayookh Bhaumik
Cast: Deepti Naval, Sandeep Shikhar



Delhi International Film Festival



Mohit's has assisted eminent director duo Sunil Sukthankar and Sumitra Bhave on their award winning film "Devraai" and has edited their National Award winner film 'Kaasav'. Mohit has also directed a biographical film on the life and works of eminent Marathi playwright Mahesh Elkuncwar, produced by Sahitya Akademi. He has assisted celebrated Theatre Director Tim Supple for "A Midsummer Night's Dream". He is the recipient of Sangeet Natak Akademi's Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar , Aditya Vikram Birla Kalakiran Puraskar , Sahitya Rangbhoomi Pratishthan Fellowship , Amrith Puri Award , Maharashtra State Award for Best Play and Best direction and many more.

print source: mrtakalkar@gmail.com +91 98222 6751 5

The Bright Day

94 mins | Hindi, English

2015

Shiv, with a supportive family, a close group of friends and a normal life in all respects, sets out on a journey to discover what he seeks in the outside world, not knowing when, if at all, he will return. He is searching for something but isn't sure what exactly he seeks. He finds that the outside world is distinctly different from the one that he inhabits. He ventures out, completely vulnerable, on a journey that takes him through diverse landscapes of life – arid, vast, claustrophobic, open, abundant. Experiencing a whole new life is simultaneously frightening, exhilarating and intense. He faces insecurity, enjoys adventure and freedom and learns about different philosophies. He encounters various people along the way. Some resolved, some confused and some in-between but each seeking something. Although there is assurance in finding co-travelers on your path, no two stories are alike and in that lies the crux of each one's journey. A trembling mind has set out on a journey into the unknown towards light...its own light.

Story & Direction Mohit Takalkar **Screenplay** Mohit Takalkar, Varun Narvekar
Editor Mohit Takalkar **Producer** Abhijeet Bhosale **Original Music** Benedict Taylor
Cast: Sarang Sathaye, Shernaz Patel, Rajit Kapur, Radhika Apte, Kelly Marie Miller, Mohan Agashe



Toronto International Film Festival



Sumitra Bhawe, a social scientist researcher turned to filmmaking with Sunil Sukthankar in 1985. They have directed 14 films like Doghi, Devrai, Vastupurush, Ek Cup Chya, more than 50 short films, 5 TV serials and telefilms. Their films have received 6 international awards, 11 National Awards, more than 45 State awards and much more. Sumitra Bhawe is a recipient of Chitra Ratna Purashkar and Kamdhenu award for literary contribution.

print source: vichitraniirmiti@gmail.com

Kaasav

105 mins | Marathi

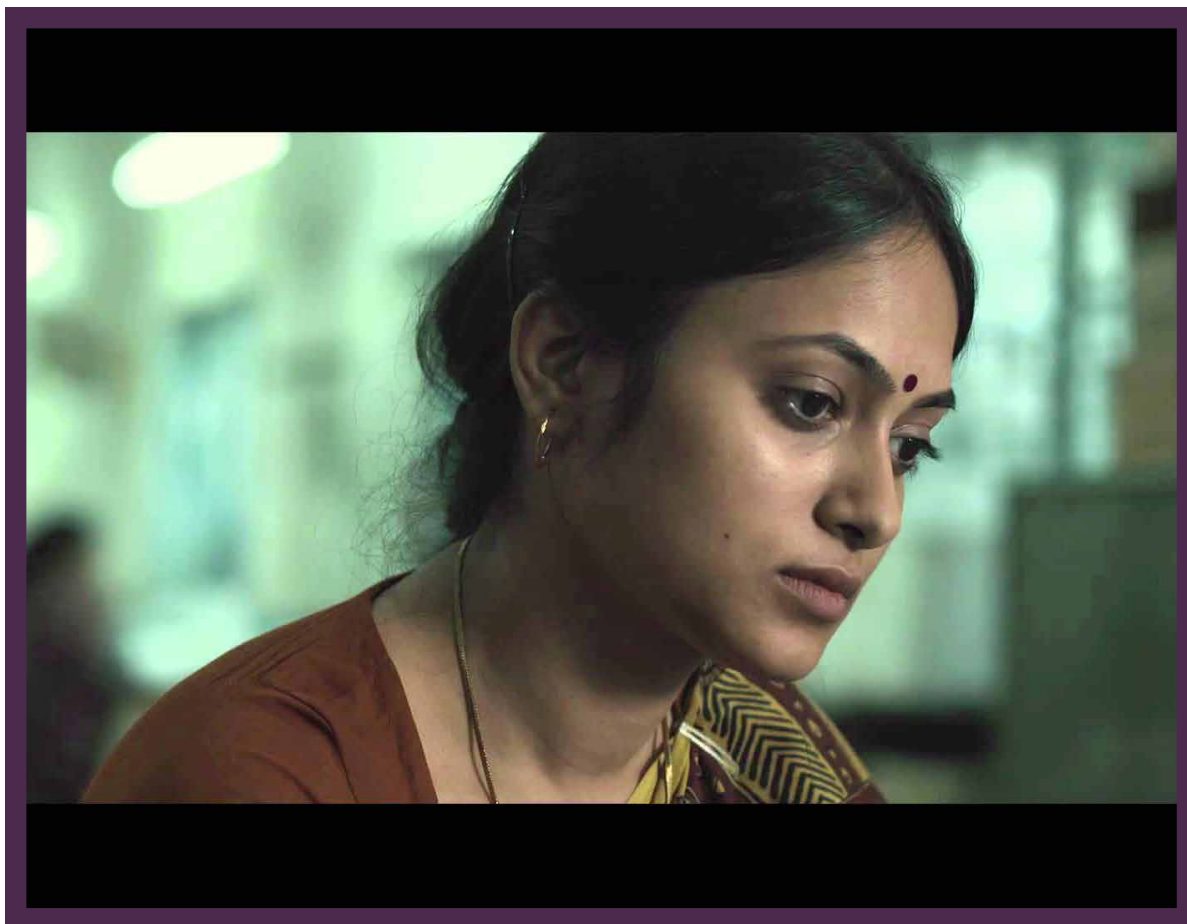
2016

Janaki, a divorcee trying to find meaning in life in a sea turtle conversation project run in a coastal village, accidentally meets an anonymous young man Manav who has escaped from a hospital he was admitted for attempted suicide. Janaki tries to create a non-judgemental, non-intrusive, warm atmosphere to help him boom. Janaki herself, her driver-assistant Yadu, conservatist Datta-bhau, servant Bablya and street kid Parshu-become the vulnerable young Manav's support system. This film is not just about depression, loneliness or the subconscious endangering feeling that the world doesn't need you but also, about survival. It compares the mental shell of a patient of depression with that of a turtle; Withdrawal from the world at the slightest sign of an impending threat is the common behavioral pattern of both. Overlapping the stories of two people who have dealt with mental health issues along with a turtle saving program, Kaasav will make you feel like you matter.

Directed: Sumitra Bhawe, Sunil Sukthankar **Producer(s)** Mohan Agashe, Sumitra Bhawe, Sunil Sukthankar **Written:** Sumitra Bhawe **Story and Screenplay** Sumitra Bhawe **Cinematographer** Dhananjay Kulkarni **Editor** Mohit Takalkar **Music** Saket Kanetkar **Cast:** Iravati Harshe, Alok Rajwade, Kishor Kadam, Mohan Agashe Devika Daftardar, Santosh Redkar, Omkar Ghadi



IFFK, MIFF, BIFFES
National Award Best Film, 2016
New York India Film Festival



Aditya Vikram Sengupta is an Indian film director, cinematographer and graphic designer.

print source: mohinta.vikram@gmail.com +91 90048 6161 6

Asha Jaoar Majhe

(Labour of Love) 84mins | Bengali

2014

In crumbling back lanes of modern Kolkata, a married couple can only see each other in their dreams after they work opposite shifts. While being a wordless drama, it is strikingly reminiscent of detail-obsessed European films like Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles. In the absence of dialogue and plot and other familiar comforts, we're forced to concentrate on the minutiae of life: a fish on a slab, ready to be cut open, eyes still blinking; water sizzling on the surface of a pan; grains being poured into a container; the sun slowly disappearing below the horizon. We're made to notice textures, colours, hear sounds that we would normally ignore. At times, the bustle of life is replaced by musical selections—shehnai maestro Bismillah Khan's rendering of raga Tilak Khamod, Geeta Dutt singing Tumi Je Amar—and then the image slows down, stretches out and unwinds like something out of a Wong Kar-wai film.

Written, Directed & Edited : Aditya Vikram Sengupta **Producer:** For Films
Cinematographer Mahendra J. Shetty and Aditya Vikram Sengupta
Music Alokanda Dasgupta **Cast** Ritwick Chakraborty, Basabhatta Chatterjee



Venice International Film Festival (Best Debut Director)
New York Indian Film Festival
National Award, India



Village Rockstars

87 mins | Assamese

2017

A young village girl in northeast India wants to start her own rock band, only to be hit with the cruel reality of life that is metaphorically revealed through the forces of nature. There's a serenity to the film, an unhurried quality—you're watching life unfold and there's no rush to get to a climax.



Rima Das is an Assamese film maker and scriptwriter.

print source: rima.films@gmail.com

Written, Shot, Edited & Directed Rima Das **Producer** Rima Das and Jaya Das
Music Nilotpal Borah **Cast** Bhanita Das, Basanti Das



Toronto International Film Festival,
San Sebastian Film Festival
Medellin International Film Festival, MIFF, IFFK



Haobam Paban Kumar is a Manipuri director and producer, known for Lady of the Lake (2016) and AFSPA, 1958 (2006).

print source: haobampaban@gmail.com

Loktak Lairembee

(Lady of the Lake) 71 mins | Manipuri

2016

Tomba, a depressed fisherman gets a gun accidentally. He marvels with the gun as his power of self-protection. He transforms himself to an assertive man who began to believe that the gun would solve all his problems. "Lady of the Lake" fits snugly into the middle ground between fiction that resembles documentary and documentary that borrows narrative components from fiction. It opens with a montage of burning huts. The troubles on the seemingly placid waters are viewed through a married couple. The wife frets about their daughter's fate and complains about her husband's endless brooding. She dismisses his claims that he has been seeing an old woman on the lake as a hallucination, and is alarmed when he produces a gun that he finds in the reeds.

Produced and Directed Haobam Paban Kumar **Cinematographer** Shehnad Jalal **Editor** Sankha **Screenplay** Sudhir Naroibam **Cast** Ningthoujam anatom-ba, Sagolsam Thambalsang



IFFK,
BIFFES,
Jogja Netpac Asian Film Festival



Suresh Sangaiah joined the team of National award winner M.Manikandan soon after arriving in Chennai. After working for five years as a writer, associate and assistant director on his projects including the globally acclaimed “Kakaa Mut-tai”, Suresh impressed Eros South with his unique style of story narration.

print source: tangaraj_icafe@hotmail.com

Oru Kidayin Orunai Manu

(One Goat's Mercy Petition) 116 mins | Tamil
2017

Days after their wedding, Ramamurthy and Seetha gather the young and old of their village for a holy pilgrimage. They must sacrifice a goat raised by Rama's no-nonsense grandmother, to fulfil her vow made to the family deity. But when Rama takes the truck, carrying all their guests and fatally runs over a man, the people of Naduvapatti are torn on whether they should hide the body and continue on their way to protect the newly-weds or face the consequences of reporting to the police; even though there are no eye witnesses apart from them, their goat and their God.

Directed: Suresh Sangaiah **Producer** RV Films **Writers** V. Gurunathan & Sangaiah Saran **Cinematographer** R V **Editor** Praveen K L **Music** Raguram M **Cast** Vidharth, Raveena Sr, Arumugam S, K.G Mohan, Laskhmi P, George



Chennai International Film Festival, Best Tamil Film



Lenin Bharathi has over 11 years of experience working as an associate director and a co-director on notable Tamil films like “Naan Mahaan Alla”, “Vennila Kabadi Kuzhu” and “Azhagar Samiyin Kuthirai”. He looks up to directors like Martin Scorsese and Akira Kurosawa and admires Satyajit Ray for portraying the struggles of common people. Merku Thodarchi Malai is his debut feature film.

print source: nirupama.sunder@gmail.com

Merku Thodarchi Malai

122 mins | Tamil

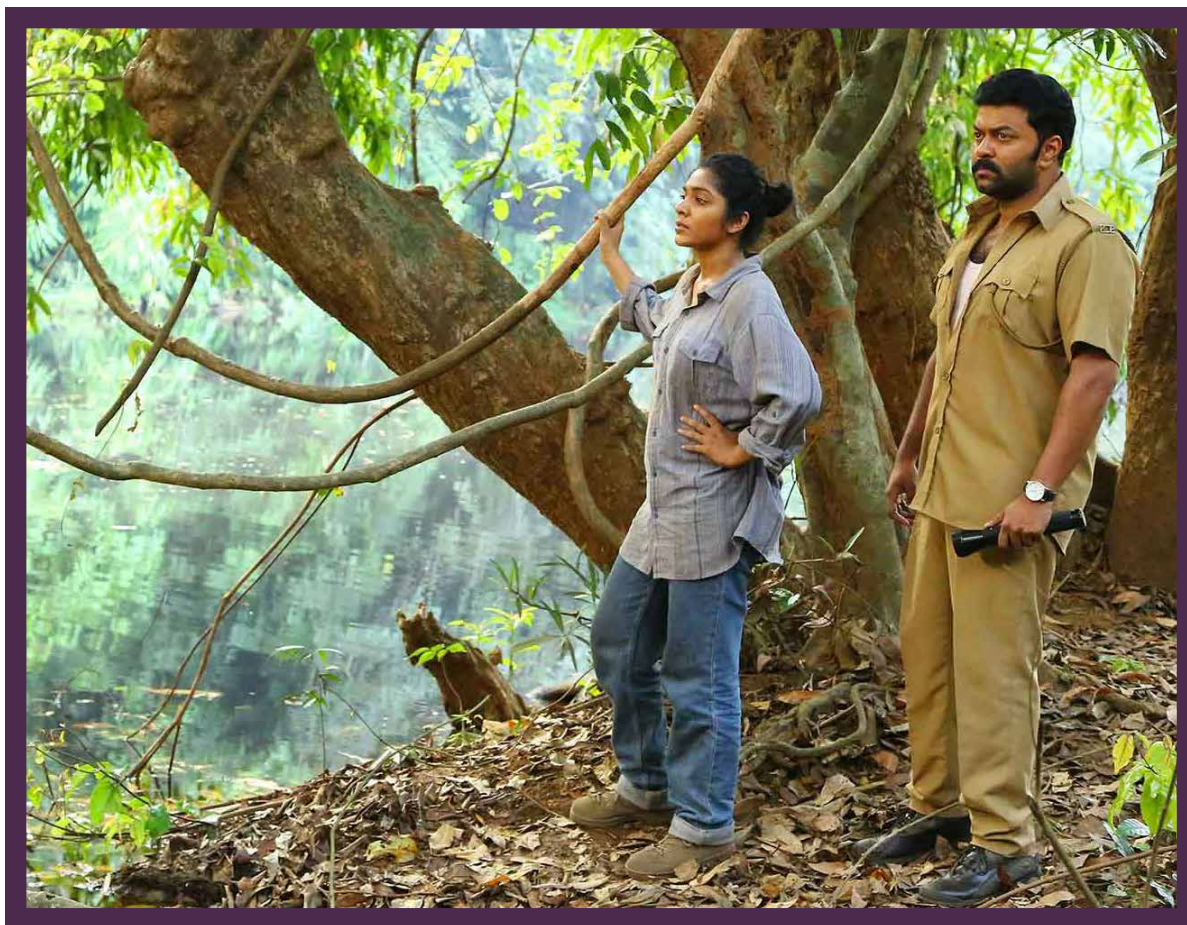
2016

Rangasamy is one of many “sons of the soil”. Hailing from the long line of labourers who live on the border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, he yearns to own a piece of land and make a living by farming it himself, instead of toiling in the spice plantations of others forever. After years of dedicated service to the local communist party, led by the passionate Chaako who advocates on behalf of the labourers, Rangasamy is finally in a position to purchase his own land. However, buying land is only half the battle for the poor like him—prospering from it amidst the corrupt dealings of the wealthy, the party and globalization is the far greater struggle which Rangasamy learns the hard way.

Written and Directed: Lenin Bharathi **Producer** Vijay Sethupathi **Cinematographer** Theni Easwar **Editor** by Mu. Kasi Viswanathan **Music** Ilaiyaraaja **Cast** Antony, Gayathri Krishna, Abu Valayankulam, Anthony vathiyar, ‘Late’ Sudalai (a) M. S. Lai, Arubala, Uoothu Rasa, Thevaram Sornam



IFFK,
New York Indian Film Festival

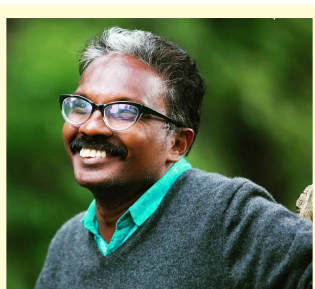


Kaadu Pookkuneram

(When the Woods Bloom) 105 mins

Malayalam | 2016

A special battalion of police is deployed by the government to do away with Maoist menace (A banned Left organization) in a tribal village near forest. The police forcibly occupy a tribal primary school for their camp. One day, the police are on lookout for some people in the forest near the school at night. A policeman follows a person deep into the forest and nabs the person. The person arrested happens to be a woman. He tries to come out of the forest with the arrested person, but he loses his way in the wild. The woman knows the path to get out of the forest but she is not willing to show him the way. Thus, both the hunter and the hunted are stranded in the thick forest. Power, Crime, Man, Woman, the Hunter, the Hunted... all such equations change utterly and are no more what they used to be.



Dr. Biju (Bijukumar Damodaran) is an Indian filmmaker who has won the National Film Award three times. He has also served as the jury member for India's National Film Awards 2012.

print source: drbijufilmmaker@yahoo.co.in

Written & Directed Dr. Biju **Producer** Sophia Paul **Cinematographer** M. J. Radhakrishnan **Editing** Karthik Jogesh **Cast** Indrajith Sukumaran, Rima Kallingal, Indrans, Prakash Bare, Irshad, Krishnan Balakrishnan, Master Govardhan



Montreal International Film Festival
IFFK,
IFFI Indian Panorama



Born in 1962 in Burdwan, West Bengal. She is trained in Hindustani Classical and rabindra Sangeet, acted in films since 1985 made her debut film Anu in 1999, she has directed 7 films over the last two decades. She has served as a jury member on multiple festivals.

print source: satarupasanyal@yahoo.co.in

Onyo Opalaa

(Opalaa, the journey of a woman) 112 mins

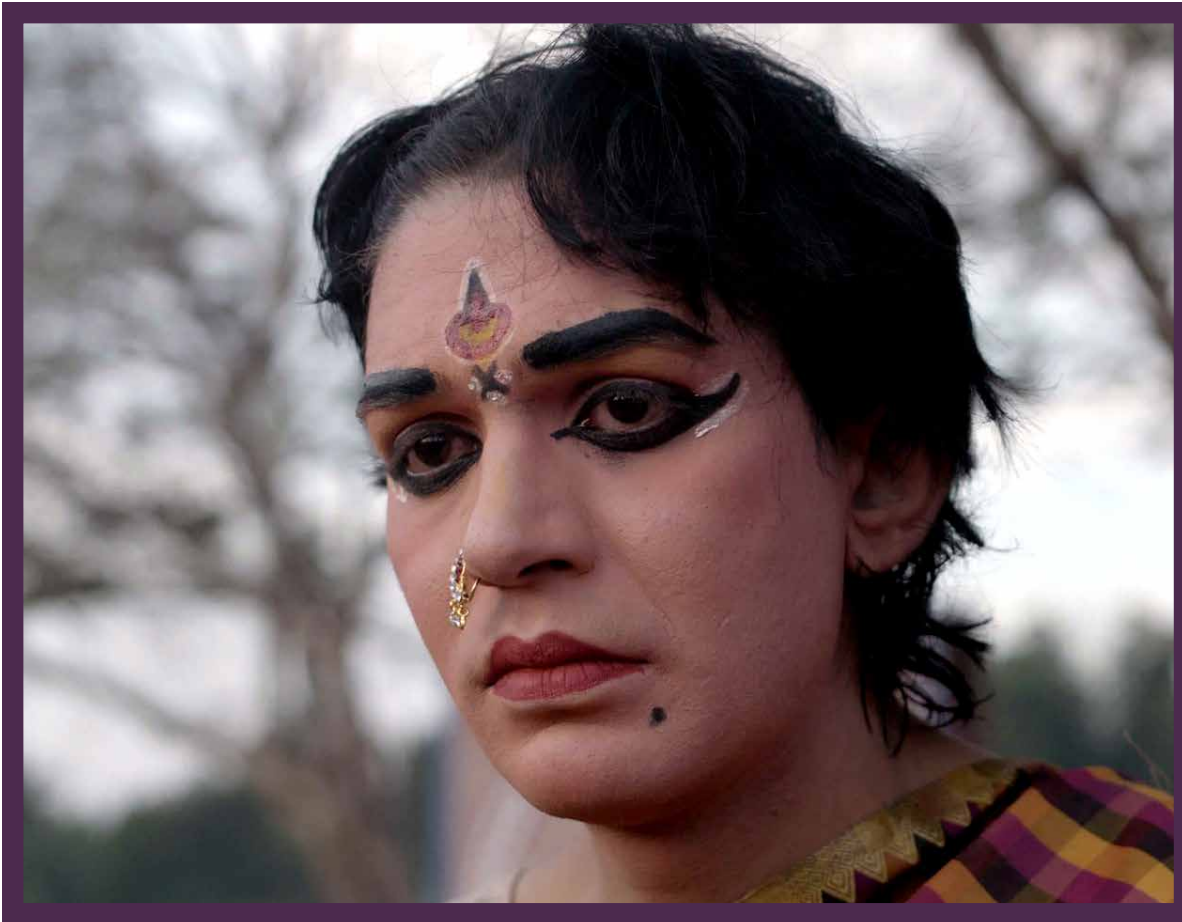
Bengali | 2015

Opalaa tried to win his love a lot but failed. She noticed that the most important person in the family was Ananta, the Guru to this family. He was young and handsome. But he was strange. And her husband, Shyam served this person with devotion taking him as no other than Krishna. Opalaa, as a result, hated this man. When she came to know the secret of this relationship, she took poison to commit suicide, but Shyam took care of her and with affection and love treated her back to life.

Director Satarupa Sanyal **Producer** SCUD **Music Director** Anindya Banerjee
Story Rajib Das **Script and Dialogue** Rajib Das and Satarupa Sanyal **DOP** Samik Talukdar **Editor** Dipak Mandal **Art Director** Debashis Chakraborty **Sound** Ayan Bhattacharya **Cast** Rupa Ganguly Nigel Akkara, Ritabhari Chakraborty, Bhaswar Chatterjee



IFFK
Indian Panorama , IFFI



Harikatha Prasanga

(Chronicles of Hari) 105 mins

Kannada | 2015

“Harikatha Prasanga” narrates the story of a Yakshagana artist Hari who has gained extreme popularity portraying female roles. Life of Hari unfolds through different perspectives captured in three episodes across four audio-visual interviews conducted by filmmakers Sharmila and Sundar.



Ananya Kasaravalli has a masters degree in film making from L.V.Prasad Film and TV academy, Chennai. Born into a family of film makers, her interest in film making comes naturally to her. She has had a successful career in acting - films, tv and theater before joining as a student at Prasad academy. As a young director ananya has won many awards for her short films “wasiyat nama”, and documentary on transfemininity – “beyond binary” and “Kappu kallina shaitan”. ‘Harikatha Prasanga’ is her first feature film.

print source: ananyakasavalli@gmail.com

Direction Ananya Kasaravalli **Production** Basant Patil **Screenplay** Ananya Kasaravalli, Girish Kasaravalli, Gopalakrishna Pai **Cinematography** Udit Khurana **Editing** Mohan Kamakshi **Cast** Shrunga Vasudevan, K G Krishnamurthy



BIFEES, Best Kannada Film
IFFK
IFFI, Indian Panorama



Self taught Independent filmmaker from Chennai, Vijay started out by making short films, corporate videos and TVCs. Vijay is currently developing his second feature *The Displaced*, which is expected to begin shooting in 2018. Vijay runs a production company named Tournage Productions, which has produced his short films and also his debut feature.

print source: vijay.jayapal2003@gmail.com

Revelations

118 mins | Tamil

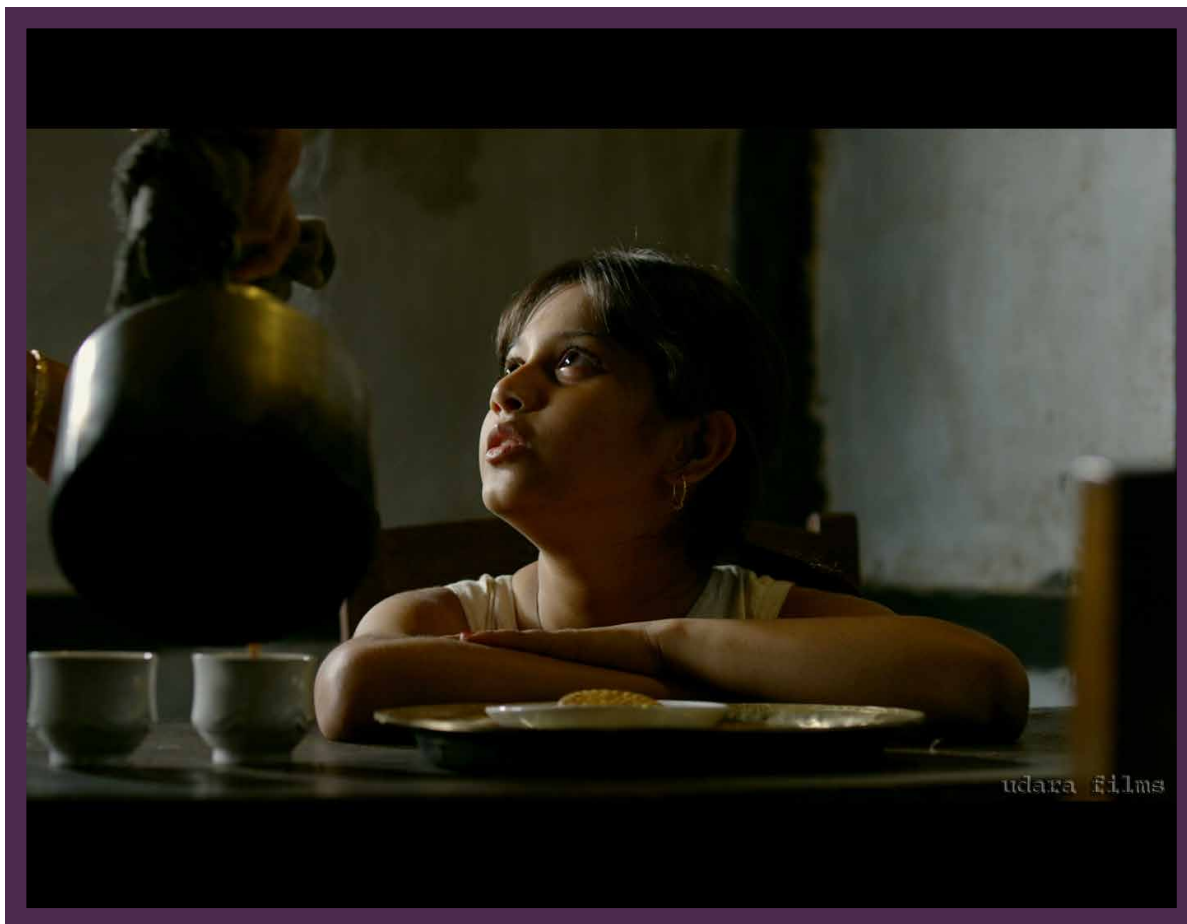
2016

A young Tamil woman, grappling with unknown tensions in her four year long marriage, develops a complex relationship with her new neighbor, a middle-aged man, who has a mysterious past of his own. This relationship soon begins to unravel many secrets, which change their lives forever. Set in the fascinating city of Kolkata, the film tries to explore themes such as guilt, redemption and female sexuality in the context of an Indian marriage.

Written and Directed Vijay Jayapal **Editor** Sai Arun **Music** Shamanth
Cast Chetan , Lakshmi Priyaa Chandramouli , Anantharaman Karthik , Arpita Banerjee



Busan International Film Festival
 IFFK
 BIFFES, Goteborg Film Festival



Maaj Rati Keteki

116 mins | Assamese

2016

A creative mind discerns human anguish even in the midnight cries of a keteki bird. Renowned author Priyendu Hazarika returns after a long absence to the town where once he was inspired to begin his journey as a writer. A book at times imitates the author's life. Memories stir and he remembers people he loved and lost. He admits to lacking the courage to weave a painful, harsh truth into his stories. At the end of the day however, he decides to face his own truth, alone, away from the appreciative audience.



Accomplished radio/theatre actress Santwana Bardoloi is well known in her home state of Assam. She is also one of the senior Pediatricians practicing in Guwahati.

print source: drsbardoloi@udara.in

Script & Direction Santwana Bardoloi **Cinematographer** Gnana Shekar V.S.
Editor Ushma Bardoloi **Music** Anurag Saikia **Cast** Adil Hussain, Shakil Imtiaz,
Mahendra Rabha, Sulakshana Baruah, Rahul Gautam Sarma, Pranami Bora,
Indu Mohan Das



Rajat Kamal
IFFK
BIFEES



Manikandan got his major break with the short film Wind (2010), his directorial debut. The film caught the attention of Tamil film director Vetrimaran, who helped him produce Kaaka Muttai, his feature film debut.

print source: directormmanikandan@gmail.com

Kutrame Thandanai

99 mins | Tamil

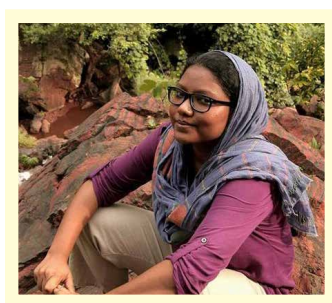
2015

Ravi, a mild mannered hardworking bachelor, with a lifelong tunnel vision problem is on the brink of blindness , unless he can raise money for an immediate eye transplant. After exhausting all honest avenues for funding with no success, financial opportunity and ethical dilemma presents itself when he discovers the dead body of his young female neighbor, and her wealthy boss who is desperate for Ravi's silence at the gory crime scene. Arguing that his needs justify it, he decides to accept a modest bribe for his transplant but soon becomes trapped in a cycle of medical, judicial and moral corruption eventually becoming one of the police's key witnesses and prime suspects in the girl's murder.

Cinematographer & Director M. Manikandan **Producer(s)** S. Harihara Naganathan, S. Muthu, S. Kaleeswaran **Written** M. Manikandan and Anand Annamalai **Editor** Anucharan **Music** Ilaiyaraaja **Cast:** Vidharth, Pooja Devariya, Aishwarya Rajesh, Rahman



New York Indian Film Festival
MIFF, IFFK
Chennai International Film Festival



Lipika is a filmmaker based in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. An alumna of the Film & Television Institute of India, specializing in film sound recording and is also an avid film editor.

print source: lipika.ftii@gmail.com

Dahani Ku Nei Galpo

(Some Stories Around Witches) 53 mins

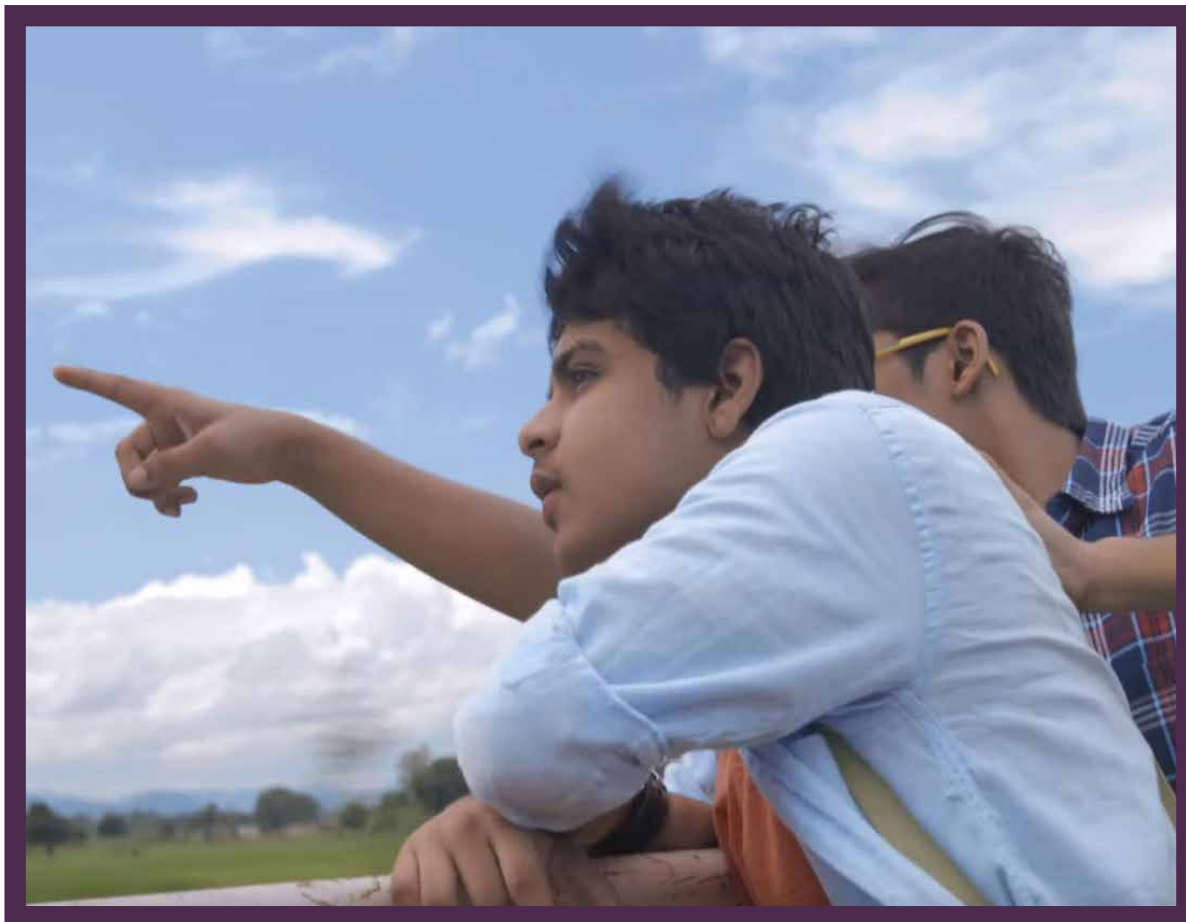
Odia | 2016

The film does not deal with witchcraft as a practice. It depicts the humanitarian crisis surrounding the cases of witch hunting taking us closer to the people, who have been accused, ostracized, tortured and the circumstances that have led to it. The film primarily engages in three cases from some parts of Odisha, India, which finds resonance in other parts of the country as well. A teenage girl kills an old woman, one of her relatives thinking that she is a witch and the cause of her father's death. A village turns into a mob over night to kill three people, a man and two women who were identified as witches by a witch doctor. A family believed to bring ill fate, excommunicated and threatened after they cook meat. Talking about the nuances of the incidents, the film tries to explore the politics of witch hunting - how superstitions, greed, ignorance, fear, insecurity, power in combination can result in immense suffering.

Director, Editor, Sound Design Lipika Singh Darai **Producer** PSBT, Public Service Broadcasting Trust, India **Cinematographer/ Associate Director** Indraneel Lahiri



Signs Film Festival Kerala
MIFF
Queen City Film Festival Maryland



Lipika is a filmmaker based in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. An alumnus of the premier film school, the Film & Television Institute of India, specializing in film sound recording and is also an avid film editor.

print source: lipika.ftii@gmail.com

The Waterfall

21 min | English

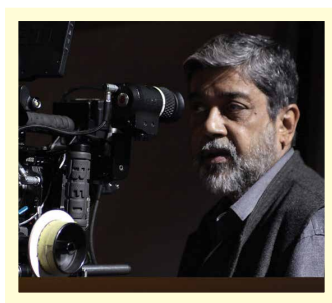
2017

The Waterfall traces the evolution of a young city boy, Karun, to appreciate the value of the environment as well as think critically about climate change and development. On a trip to his ancestral home in the interiors of the state of Orissa in India, he reflects on the nature of his relationship with a beautiful landscape and its relationship in turn with his city life. As the film unfolds the two young boys get deeply connected to the waterfall. Gradually they come to know a disturbing news. The forests are going to disappear. The city boy while exploring the landscape gets to know about ideas of development. The city boy comes back with a new perception to the city. How a waterfall becomes the river and how the river flows through the water pipes in the houses in his city. He also learns that the mysterious hills and forests that they were exploring are about to be taken over by a company. The community of people living in the forests under the leadership of an old man has been standing up to safeguard the forests which has taken billions of years to form.

Director, Editor Lipika Singh Darai **Producer(s)** Sayed Sulatan Ahemed for LXL Ideas, School Cinema **Cinematographer, Associate director** Indraneel Lahiri **Sound Design** Subhodeep Sengupta **Cast** Soham Maitra, Rwitobroto Mukherjee, Indrashish Roy, Bilua Nayak



International Film Festival South Asia Toronto
IFFI (Indian Panorama))
MIFF



Saibal Mitra is working in Bengal Film Industry since 1977. He Started career as Assistant Director, worked with major film directors of Bengal like Goutam Ghosh & with Ronald Joffe (Hollywood). . Saibal had made 4 Feature films, 16 shorts and Documentaries.

print source: purkayasthapk@gmail.com

Chitrokar

147 mins | Bengali

2016

Blind painter Bijon Basu of early modernist school of paintings spent much of his life inspiring students by bringing stories to life around him through his paintings and idealism. Now late in his life, he resides peacefully in the village of 'Ekla', where he is admired for his character and talents. Bijon's life is interrupted by a proposal from Palash a gallery owner of Kolkata to create a series of murals for decoration of an exclusive restaurant in the city of Kolkata, a journey that brings young strong-minded yet frustrated contemporary painter Tithi into his life to assist him. Their relationship unfolds through the lines of the mural, as they struggle with idea about Art of their generations and life philosophies. Bijon's blindness never stopped him from creating beauty. And now he is asked to see the world around him more clearly than ever before. For whom does a painter create? For those who can pay? Chitrokar, presents the tension between the artistic endeavour and commercial reality through a painter's eye.

Producer Pranab Kantil Purkayastha **Story, Script and Direction** Sabal Mitra
Director of Photography Asoke Dasgupta **Editing** Sumit Ghosh **Art direction**
Gautam Basu **Sound Design & Mixing** Anup Mukhopadhyaya **Costume**
Sudeshna Basu **Music** Tejendra Narayan Majumda



IFFK



Shuka Asuchi

121 mins | Odia

2015

What happens to communities that suffer the pain of conniving against themselves; when they fight an everyday battle for existence, when they survive with self-perpetuated inaction and complacency, when their dignity sold cheap. Shuka Asuchi revolves around what is generally referred to as the 're-establishment of community self'; reclaiming of self-dignity by way of questioning the insatiate power and hegemony of the powerful; rejecting self-perpetuating exploitation and denial of their consent to be manufactured. The film hopes to engage the audience to the deceptive divide ensuing from conflict of the rich and poor when the invisible and inexplicable conflict in reality is between the poor and the poor.



Sanjoy Patnaik after completing his higher studies in Political Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi joined the non-profit sector to work community's rights over local natural resources. Over the years his primary focus has been ensuring land to the landless and the under-privileged.

Direction & Screenplay Sanjoy Patnaik **Camera** Malay Ray, **Sound** Subash Sahoo, **Editing** Chakradhar Sahoo, **Music** Bidya Sahoo, **Lyrics** Sachi Mohanty, **Dialogue** Sanjoy Patnaik, **Background Score** Priyabrata Panigrahi **Cast** Sritam Das, Kuna Tripathy, Sukant Rath, Preetiraj Satpathy, Madhumita Mohanty, Minaketan Das, Aishwariya Pathy

print source: sanjoypatnaik2010@gmail.com



Raam Reddy, 26, is a graduate of St. Stephen's College, Delhi and Prague Film School. Previously, he directed a critically acclaimed short film called Ika (Feather), and has published a magic realism novel titled It's Raining in Maya. He is one of the directors of an independent production house called Prspctvs Productions. Thithi is his debut feature.

print source: krithika.y10@gmail.com

Thithi

123 mins | Kannada

2016

Thithi is a dramatic comedy about how three generations of sons react to the death of the oldest in their clan, a man named Century Gowda: a locally renowned, highly cantankerous 101-year-old man. Set in a remote village in South India, the three storylines intertwine before converging at Century Gowda's 'thithi' — the final funeral celebration, 11 days after a death. Century Gowda's eldest son, Gadappa (literally translating to "Beard Man"), is himself a little old man who spends his time nonchalantly wandering the village fields, puffing cheap cigarettes and swigging brandy. Gadappa's far more materialistic son, Thamanna, plots to illegally sell Century Gowda's five-acre property, even though the land officially belongs to his father. At the same time, Thamanna's confident pubescent son, Abhi, shrugs his responsibilities to relentlessly pursue a shepherd girl.

Direction Raam Reddy **Producer** Pratap Reddy, Sunmin Park **Director of Photography** Doron Tempert **Editing** John Zimmerman, Raam Reddy **Sound** Nithin Lukose **Cast** Channegowda, Thammegowda S., Abhishek H.N., Pooja S.M.



Locarno Film Festival
National Film Awards,
Marrakech Film Festival, MIFF

Closing Film



Born in Subarnapur, Odisha, son of a school teacher, studied law but took up filmmaking. Won the International Special Jury Award at the Gijon Film Festival Spain, for the film Bukha(The Hungry in 1990. His film Bou(mother), bagged seven state awards. He has been a jury member for various state and national awards committees.

Pahada ra Luha

116 mins | Odia

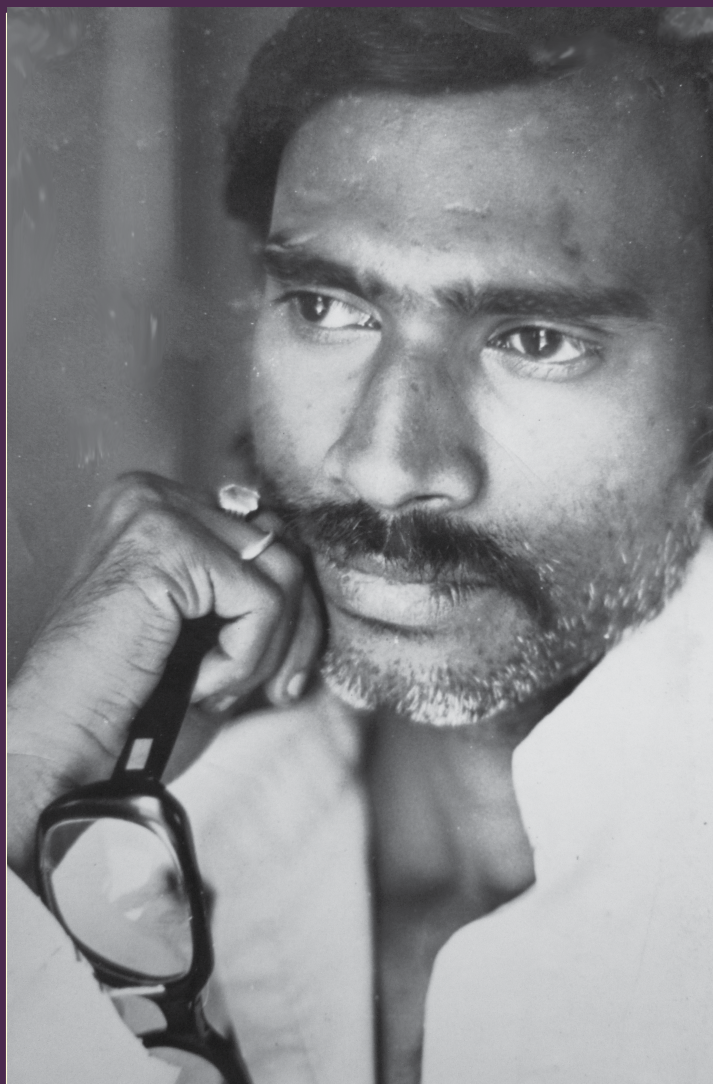
2017

Sameer, a young city bred man travels to the tribal village, Gumma, with his uncle who is a tribal welfare officer. Gumma is a remote village situated between the border of two states. He decides to stay for a few days and learn about their traditions, falls in love with a tribal girl. Meanwhile he discovers the land dispute of the villagers between the two neighbouring states. Sameer tries to help the people save their land and culture. Will he succeed? What are his chances?

Story, Script and Direction Sabyasachi Mohapatra **Producer** Sushant Mohapatra **Director of Photography** B Satish and Karim Khatri **Editing** Rajendra Mahapatra and Deben Mishra **Music** Ramesh Mahanand **Cast** Sarat Pujari, Swati Roy, Soumen Pujari, Asrumochan Mohanty, Mantu Mohapatra and the tribal people of village Jharigaon (Koraput Odisha)



National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Odia



In Memory of Nirad N. Mohapatra

12 November 1947

-

19 February 2015

He was with Film Society of Bhubaneswar right from the beginning. He helped it shape in many ways, always supportive, always encouraging, and always ready to share his deep knowledge and wisdom of cinema. The journey with FSB was of a decade long. Always enthusiastic to interact with the younger generation, championing the cause of film societies and good cinema, he was hardly ever lacking in positive energy.

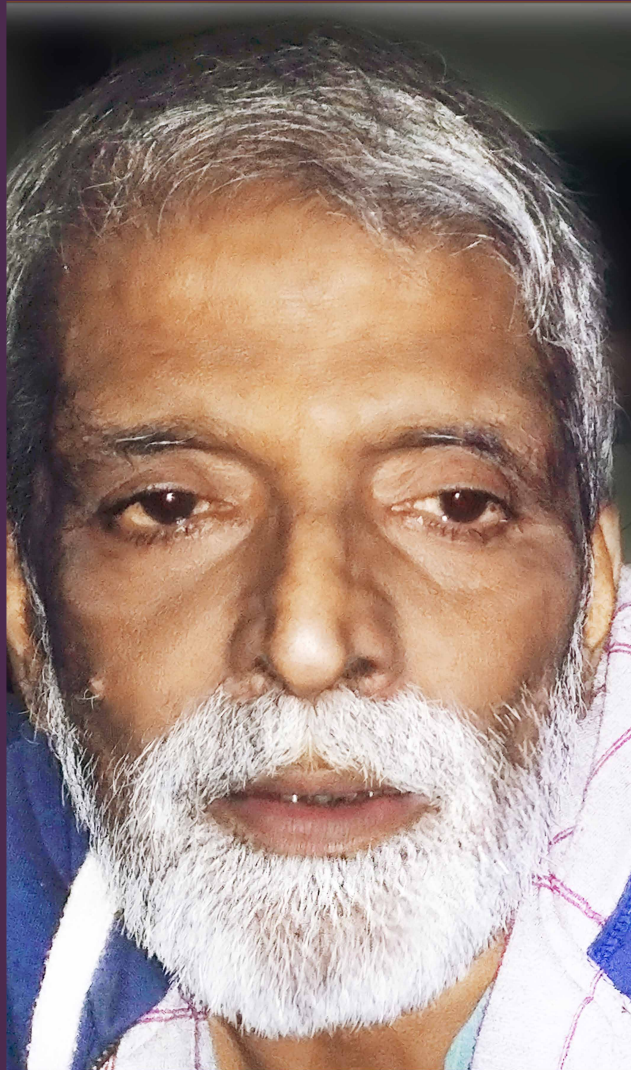
Maya Miriga will remain not only one of the finest achievements in Indian New Wave but in World Cinema.

Contemplative and gentle, carrying a profound sense of acceptance of life, the exquisite formal mastery of Maya Miriga carries the very qualities that characterized the man.

A Japanese Haiku by Matsuo Basho was very dear to him, as were the films of Yasujiro Ozu. We feel that the little poem by Basho gives a sense of the passage of time that he would want us to look at, both in cinema and life.

Sitting quietly, doing nothing
Spring comes and the grass grows by itself.

- Matsuo Basho



In memory of
B. Surya Pratap

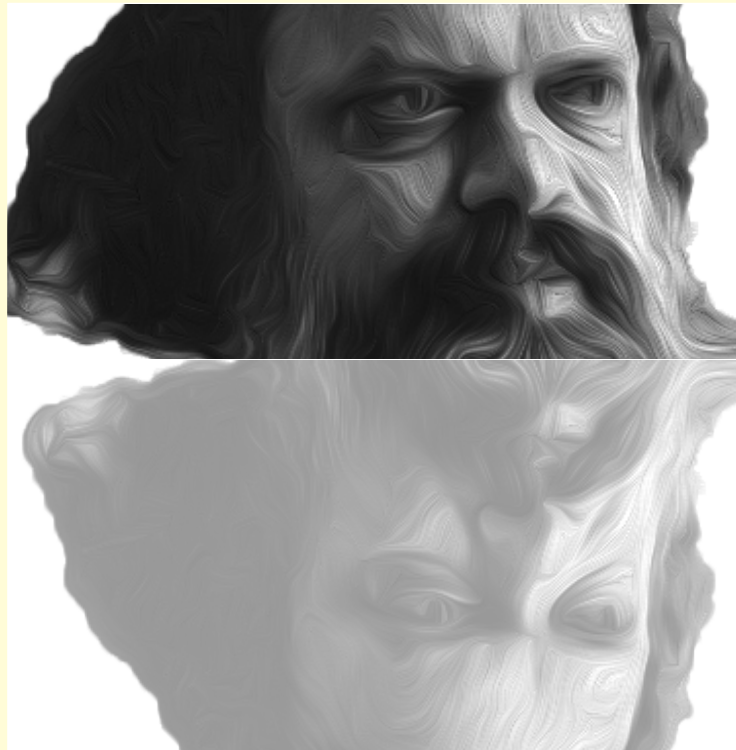
9 November 1953

—

24 September 2017

He searched for good cinema. To him watching a film was a worthwhile pursuit and he made it so for many others. He took part in film societies and stood by them. Film societies, he believed, expanded the world of cinema for the viewer. Like a book is not complete without its reader, the film is not complete without its viewer. Films in search of that viewer will miss him.

We will too.



retrospective

G Aravindan

21 January 1935 – 15 March 1991

photo credits : Ramu Aravindan, N.L Balakrishanan, Nasreen Munni Kabeer

film source: Kerala State Chalachitra Academy | NFAI

“

I stand by my conviction.
My total commitment is to cinema as a medium.
I do not believe in short cut and cheap gimmicks.
Subtlety is my style. I believe that is more acceptable
and suited to our way of life, culture and aesthetics.
I cannot overlook social values. I enjoy making movies
that are in communion with Nature.

”

Filmography

1974: Uttarayanam (The Throne of Capricorn)

1977: Kanchana Seeta (Golden Seeta)

1978: Thampu (The Circus Tent)

1979: Kummatty (The Bogeyman)

1980: Estheppan (Stephen)

1981: Pokkuveyil (Twilight)

1985: Chidambaram; Viti (Documentary); The Brown Landscape
(Short Film)

1986: Oridathu (Somewhere); The Seer Who Walks Alone
(Documentary)

1987: Contours of a Linear Rhythm (Documentary)

1988: Marattam (Masquerade); Sahaja (Short Film); Anadi Dhara
(Documentary)

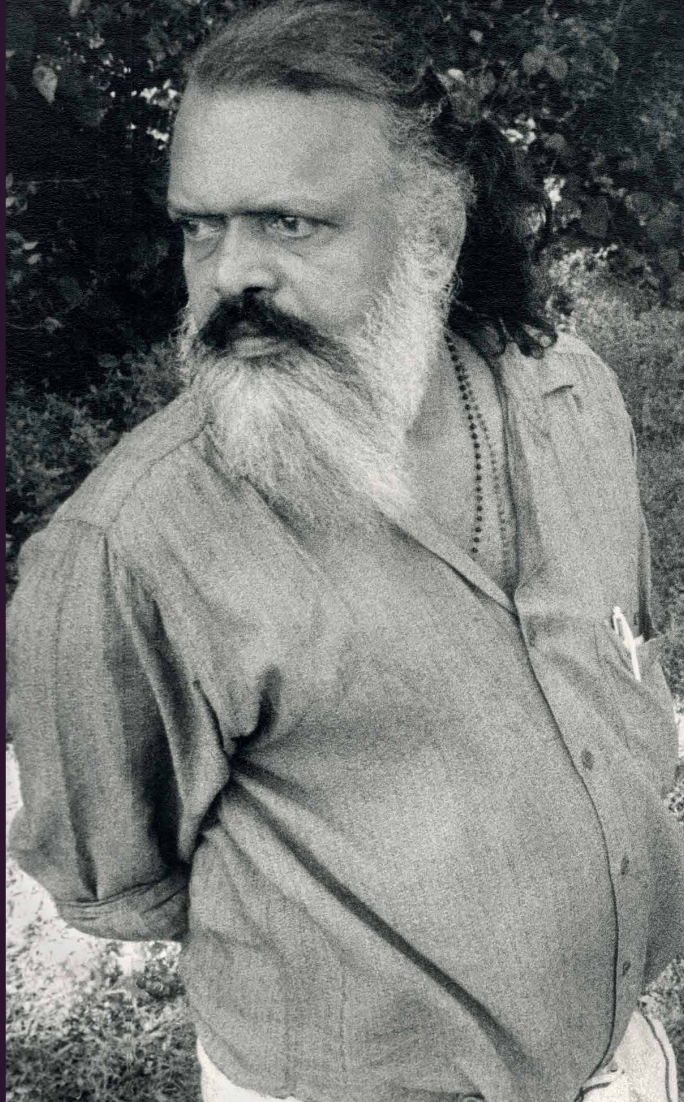
1989: Unni

1990: Vastuhara (The Dispossessed)

... to step barefoot into reality.
Wallace Stevens

The world is like the impression left by the telling of a story.
Yogavasistha

One has never seen the world well if he has not dreamed what he was seeing.
Gaston Bachelard



About the filmmaker

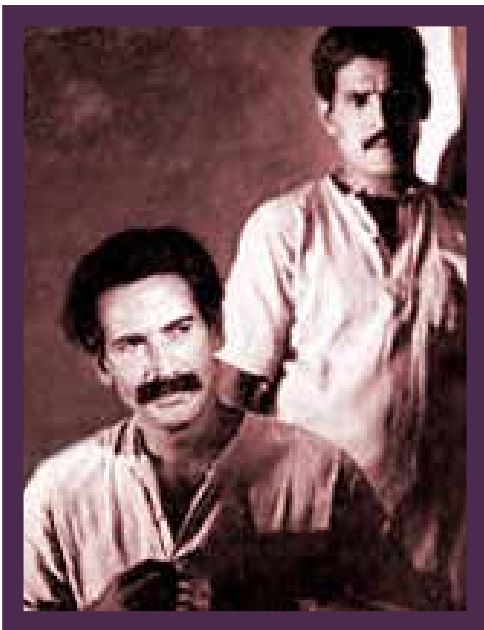
Govindan Aravindan was born in Kottayam, Kerala. His father was the literary humorist, Govindan Nair. Aravindan was well known to the readers of Kerala even before he started with his films. He worked as caricaturist for the Mathrubhoomi journal (1961-79), drawing the cartoon series Cheriya Manushyarum Valya Lokavum (Small Man and Big World), chronicling the adventures of Ramu, its proletarian hero, and Guruji. Later he did an occasional cartoon strip for the Kala Kaumudi journal, called A Bird's Eye View. His published cartoon collection (1978) highlights a change in drawing style in the early 70s, emphasising large blank spaces and characters almost disappearing below the frame.

Aravindan was active in film society movement in Kottayam and Calicut. He was part of the Calicut-based modernism represented particularly by artist Devan, the playwright and satirist Thikkodiyan and the writer Pattathiruvila Karunakaran (who produced Uttarayanam, Aravindan's first film). A major influence on this group was the spiritualism of satirist and political activist Sanjayan. Later, like the visual artists associated with the Kerala Kalapeetam in Ernakulam, Aravindan combined this influence with the new, more mystical direction taken by K.C.S. Panicker's (1911-77) paintings.

Aravindan was also a stage director, working in association with the playwright Srikantan Nair. He helped start the Navarangan (in Kottayam) and Sopanam theatre groups, staging plays like Kali (1964) and Avanavan Kadamba (1976). In these plays he used musical forms derived from the work of Kavalam Narayana Panicker, who later collaborated on the scripts of Aravindan's Kummatty and Estheppan. Noted actors associated with this group were Gopi and Nedumudi Venu. Aravindan was trained in the Kirana gharana of Hindustani classical music and occasionally directed music for other filmmakers (Yaro Oral, Piravi and Ore Thooval Pakshikal).

Aravindan worked at the Kerala Rubber Board throughout most of his film career.

He passed away on 15th January 1991.



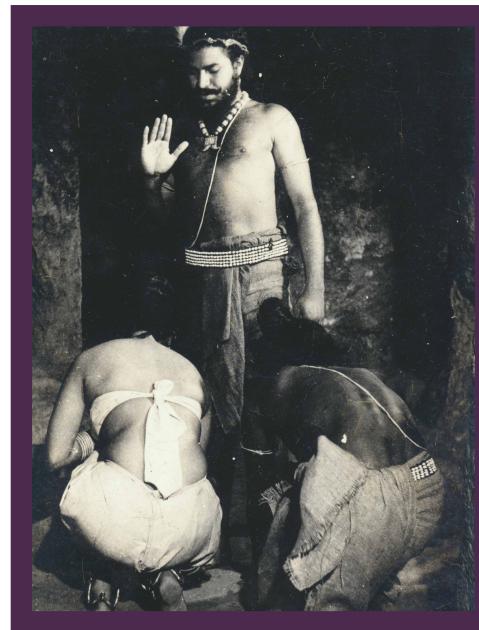
Uttarayanam (Throne of Capricorn) 1974 | 117 mins Malayalam

Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : Karunakaran (Ganesh Movie Makers)
Script : G. Aravindan and Thikkodiyan
Cinematography : Ravi Varma
Editing : A. Rameshan
Art Direction : Nambudiri
Music : Raghavan
Cast : Mohandas, Kunju, Balan K. Nair, Adoor Bhasi, Sukumaran, Mallika, Radhamani, Shanta Devi

Set in a time when a generation has grown up in post-independent India, the film deals with the memory and legacies of an anti-colonial struggle, which is the past, and the disillusionment and betrayal of the young in a decaying present. Ravi is a young man who has a series of ironic encounters, as he looks for a job. Kumaran Master is a kind of mentor to Ravi. Kumaran, and his now critically ill friend Setu, had participated in the 1942 Quit India agitations with Ravi's late father. The lawyer Gopalan Muthalaly, also a participant in those events, has become a rich contractor and an example of the corrupt post-Independence bourgeoisie. Ravi is caught between the past and the present, in search of a future that remains uncertain.

Aravindan was part of a group of artists and writers in 1960s Calicut (their work sometimes referred to as the Calicut modernism) and his first foray into filmmaking was in many ways an extension of that collaboration. The film draws on the work of the writer Pattathiruvila Karunakaran, who produced the film, and the satirical playwright Thikkodiyan, who co-scripted it. The figures of the father and the ailing friend in the film is seen by many as a kind of composite portrait of Sanjayan, a political activist, spiritualist and satirist, and major influence on the Calicut artists who participated in the film.

Won National awards for Best Feature Film on the 25th Anniversary of India's Independence and the Best Feature Film in Malayalam; Won a number of Kerala State awards including Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay



Kanchana Seeta (Golden Seeta) 1977 | 90 mins Malayalam

Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : K. Ravindranathan Nair (General Pictures)
Story: Based on a play by C.N. Sreekantan Nair
Script : G. Aravindan
Cinematography : Shaji N. Karun
Editing: A. Rameshan
Art Direction: Nambudiri
Music : Rajeev Taranath
Cast : Ramadas, Venkateshwaralu, Chinna Pullaiah, Keshav Panicker, Krishnan, Pottiah, Rangiah, Shobha Kiran, Annapurna

The film is a retelling of few episodes from the Ramayana - the punishment of the low-caste Sambuka, the banishment of Seeta and Rama's Ashwamedha Yagya. Based on C.N. Sreekantan Nair's play and Valmiki's epic, the film's title alludes to the golden image of Seeta, which Rama sets by his side for the ritual sacrifice. Seeta is never seen in the film, as she remains banished in the forest. But her presence is evoked in a cinematic language of extraordinary power foregrounding the spirit of nature, its movements and sounds - the wind rustling in the trees or rain bringing harmony where discord threatens.

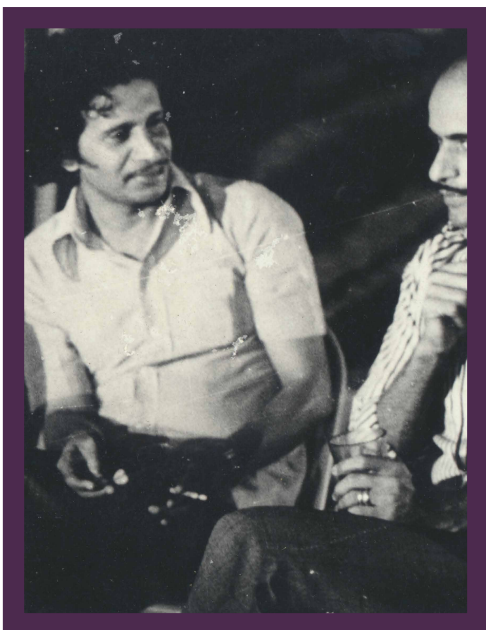
The film ends with Rama's last journey as he walks into the River Sarayu. Shaji Karun's translucent cinematography prefigures some

of the associations of nature in Aravindan's latter films.

Aravindan's Rama resembles a tribal leader rather than the familiar calendar figures. The people who play the lead characters in the film belonged to a tribal community from Andhra Pradesh (where the film was shot). Known as Rama Chenchus, they were bearers of Ramkatha for generations.

"I do not think that Seeta should come in the film in the form of a woman. That is why she is interpreted in the form of nature. Prakriti."
 "What a good writer achieves with imaginative use of language, cinema has to achieve with visual. It is here that one recognizes the limitations of technology and equipment."

Won the National Film Award for Best Director (1977)



Thampu (The Circus Tent) 1978 | 129 mins Malayalam

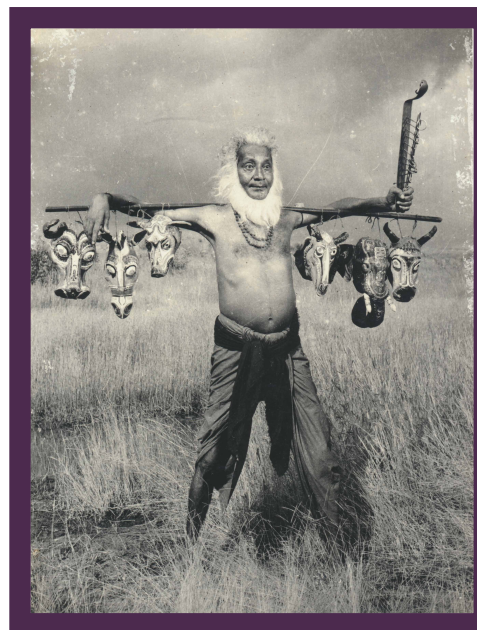
Writer-Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : K. Ravindranathan Nair (General Pictures)
Cinematography : Shaji N. Karun
Editing : A. Rameshan
Art Direction : C.P. Padmakumar
Music : M.G. Radhakrishnan
Cast : Gopi, Venu, Sriraman, Jalaja, members of the Great Chitra Circus

The film chronicles three days when a circus visits a small village in Kerala. The circus and the circus performers become part of the village life for this brief period. The episodic film uses a narrative form that consistently replaces conventional storytelling. We see school children running to the tent, the village women watching the acrobat perform, the soldier who befriends the circus strong man in a toddy bar, a pump attendant who sits on a rock each day watching a village girl bathe and dry her hair, the dwarf who brings back to the circus a watermelon larger than his head. The quasi-documentary approach is combined with minutely choreographed action to provide

a cultural mapping of life in the village. The circus comes and leaves, and life goes on. Aravindan's language of nature through cinematic image continues with unforgettable close ups of human faces, the banyan tree with leaves like transparent film, the shining water, the light in the sand at sunset.

I planned Thampu as a documentary feature. The film was shot on the banks of the Bharatapuzha. I came to the village with 10 to 15 circus artists who had already left their circus company. We did not have a script and we shot the incidents as they happened.

Won National awards for Best Feature Film on the 25th Anniversary of India's Independence and the Best Feature Film in Malayalam
 Won a number of Kerala State awards including Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay



Kummatty (The Bogeyman) 1979 | 90 mins Malayalam

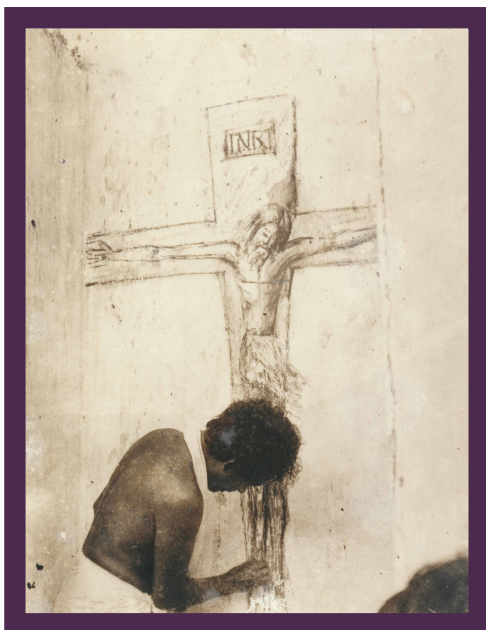
Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : K. Ravindranathan Nair (General Pictures)
Script : Kavalam Narayana Panicker and G. Aravindan
Dialogue: Kavalam Narayana Panicker & G. Aravindan
Cinematography : Shaji N. Karun
Editing : A. Rameshan
Art Direction : Nambudiri
Music : M.G. Radhakrishnan, Kavalam Narayana Panicker and G. Aravindan
Cast : Ramunni, Master Ashokan, Vilasini Reema, Kothara Gopalakrishnan

The film is based on an age-old Central Kerala folk-tale featuring a partly mythic and partly real magician called Kummatty (played by the famous musician and dancer Ramunni in his screen debut) who comes to entertain a group of village children with dancing, singing and magic tricks. In a game, he changes them into animals. One boy, changed into a dog, is chased away and misses the moment when the magician breaks the spell restoring the children to their human form. The dog-boy has to wait a year until Kummatty returns to the village. Aravindan claimed the film to be his favourite and referred to the international legend of the bogeyman which

parents use to frighten their children, except that, in Kerala, the bogeyman is often shown as a compassionate person.

My film Kummatty is on a real personality and an assumed one. If he is not this then he will remain just as an idea and what it means...as a concept he will not get into the essence of the story. I wanted to show that apart from his supernatural image, he is also real. Through the masks he brings, I have related him to the animal consciousness.

Best Children's Film, Kerala State Film Awards

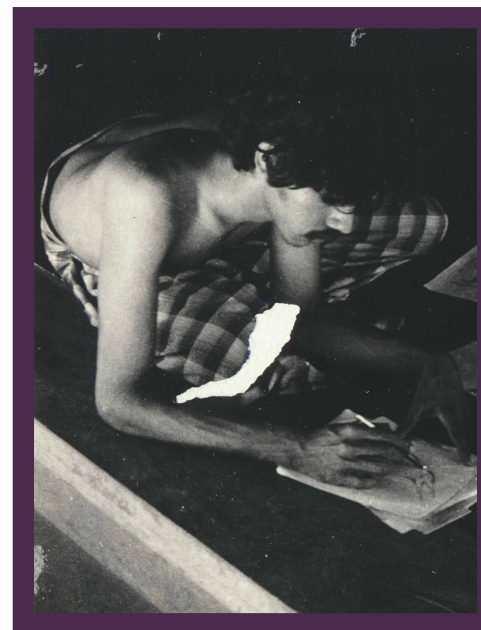


Estheppan (Stephen) 1980 | 94 mins Malayalam

Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : K. Ravindranathan Nair (General Pictures)
Story : G. Aravindan and Kavalam Narayana Panicker
Script : G. Aravindan and Isaac Thomas Kutukapally
Cinematography : Shaji N. Karun
Editing : A. Rameshan
Music : G. Aravindan and Janardhan
Cast : Rajan Kakkanadan, Krishnapuram Leela, Sudharma, Shobha, Catherine, Balakrishnan Nair, Ganesan, Gopalakrishnan, M.R. Krishnan, Francis David

Estheppan is a fisherman, who lives in a fishing village in Kerala. Estheppan's story unfolds through stories narrated by other fishermen about his strange acts, like printing his own money and drinking whisky without getting drunk. Through the contradictory statements of the people in the community, the figure of Estheppan unfolds; different people describe him as a prophet, miraculous healer, thief and charlatan. Finally when the disappearance of Estheppan from the colony creates concern among fellow fishermen, the priest of the church consoles them that Estheppan would definitely come back.

Best Film and Best Director, Kerala State Film Awards



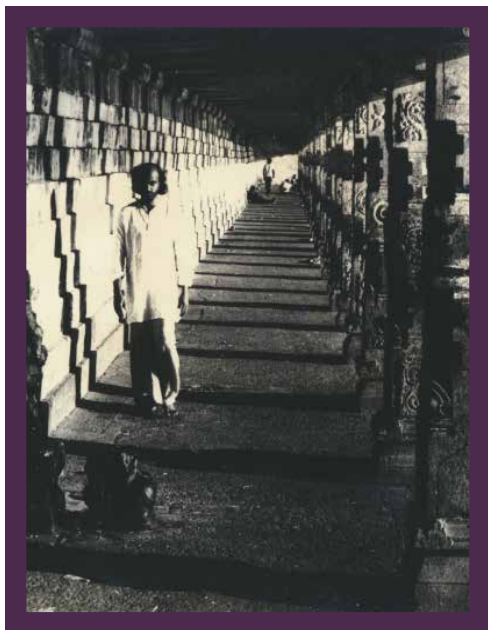
Pokkuveyil (Twilight) 1981 | 106 mins Malayalam

Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : K. Ravindranathan Nair (General Pictures)
Story and Script : G. Aravindan and Dr. Ramesh
Cinematographer : Shaji N. Karun
Editing : Gopalakrishnan
Music : Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Rajeev Taranath, Latif Ahmed
Cast : Balachandran Chullikad, Satish, Ansar, Kalpana, Vijayalakshmi, V.P. Nair

The film deals with the disintegrating force of urban life on the psychological state of a sensitive young man, who lives with his father and finds companionship in a radical friend and a music-loving young woman. The father dies, the radical has to flee and her family takes the woman to another city. The young man's world collapses. He becomes prey to hallucinations and ends up in an asylum where his mother visits him. The real life poet, Balachandran Chullikkadu portrayed the role of the young artist in Pokkuveyil.

Silver Lotus, National Film Awards; Best Director, Kerala State Awards





Chidambaram

1985 | 102 mins
Malayalam

Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : Suryakanthi Film Makers
Story : Based on a story by C.V. Shiriraman
Script : G. Aravindan
Cinematography : Shaji N. Karun
Editing : K.R. Bose
Art Direction : Nambudiri
Music : P. Devarajan
Cast : Gopi, Smita Patil, Srinivas, Mohan Das, Murali, Chandran Nair

Muniyandi works as a farm labourer in Kerala. After getting married he brings his wife, Shiva-gami, from the temple town of Chidambaram, to live with him. Shankaran, the estate manager at the farm and an amateur photographer with a shady past, befriends her. Muniyandi trusts and respects Shankaran but one day finds that his trust has been betrayed. Broken hearted, Muniyandi commits suicide. The extreme feeling of guilt forces Shankaran to leave the place. He takes to alcohol, spirituality and all other possible methods to escape from this mental torment, but fails. The story then shifts to the Chidambaram temple, as Shankaran and Shivgami meet once more.

"I liked the story of Chidambaram written by C.V. Shiriraman. There were a few specific reasons for making it into a film at that point of time. After spending three years without a producer I decided to produce this film as my own, which meant I had to cut down the expenses to the minimum. Chidambaram has only three characters. The village Mattupetty provides good backdrop to the film. There were also many friends to help me. Smita Patil had expressed her desire to act in one of my films much before this. Actor Gopi was also willing to come. When they learned that this was my own production, many artists came forward. No one acted in the film expecting any financial return. They did it for me."

National Film Award for Best Film and Kerala State Film awards for the Best Film and Best Director



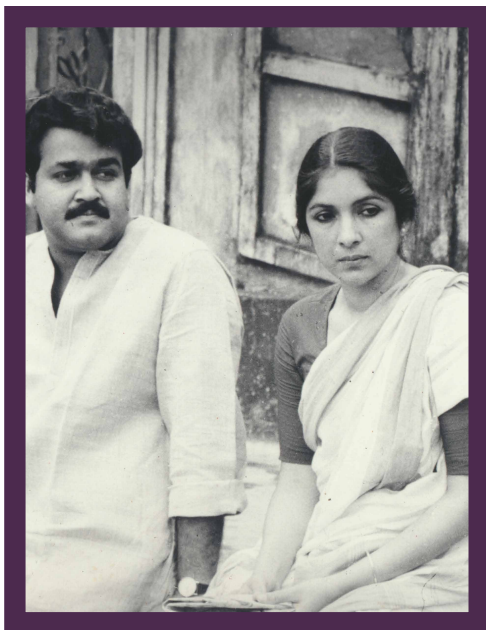
Marattam

(Faces and Masks)
1988 | 90 mins
Malayalam

Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : Doordarshan (Television)
Story and Script: Kavalam Narayana Panicker based on his own play
Cinematography : Shaji N. Karun
Editing : K.R. Bose
Art Direction : C.P. Padmakumar and Nambudiri
Cast : Sadanandan Krishnamurthy, Kalam-dalam Keshavan, Urmila Unni, Krishnankutty Nair

Made for the national television, the film is based on K. N. Panicker's one-act play dealing with the relation between an actor and his or her role. Aravindan put the stress on the relations between the viewer and the actor/role dualities. The action takes place on the eve of the last act of the Kathakali piece Keechakavadham (The Killing of Keechaka). The events surrounding the performance uncannily echo events in the play. One character even claims to have killed the lead actor

of the play because he detested the character the man portrayed. However, the three different accounts that are presented of the same plot are never resolved or reconciled with each other. Each version is accompanied by a different style of folk-music: the tune and rhythm of southern Kerala's thampuran pattu, the pulluvan pattu and the ayappan pattu. The performers were drawn from the theatre and from Kathakali.



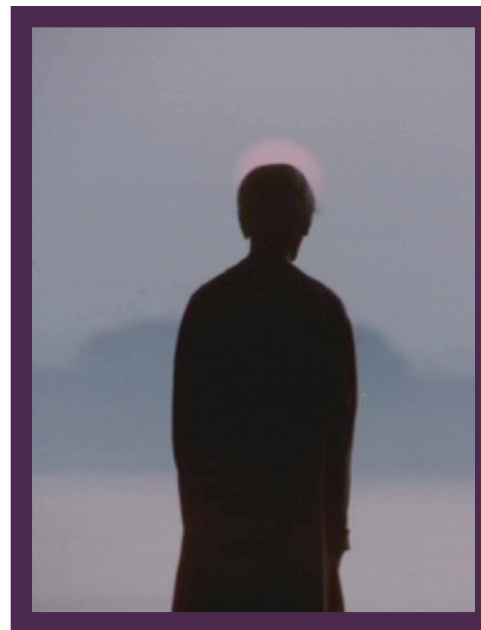
Vastuhara (The Dispossessed) 1990 | 103 mins Malayalam

Director : G. Aravindan
Producer : Paragon Movie Makers
Story : Based on a story by C.V. Shriraman
Script and Dialogue : G. Aravindan
Cinematography : Sunny Joseph
Editing : K.R. Bose
Art Direction : C.P. Padmakumar
Music : Salil Choudhury
Cast : Mohanlal, Shobhana, Neelanjana Mitra, Neena Gupta, Padmini

Aravindan's last film is based on another story by C.V. Shriraman (also the author of Chidambaram). Venu is a Malayali officer working in the ministry of rehabilitation. He is in-charge of selecting refugees from Calcutta, who have reached from Bangladesh, for rehabilitation in the Andaman Islands. In Calcutta, he meets Aarathi Panikker, the abandoned Bengali wife of his uncle from Kerala. She is living in penury. Now she is amongst the refugees seeking

rehabilitation. Re-establishing family links, he also befriends her hostile daughter and her son, a political refugee. Venu finds himself in difficulty while trying to help his aunt overcome her troubles. Their brief acquaintance ends at a shipyard where Venu hoards his emigrant refugees on deck and leaves for the islands once more.

Kerala State Film awards for the Best Film and Best Director



The Seer Who Walks Alone | Documentary 1986 | 52 mins English

Director: G. Aravindan
Camera: Shaji N. Karun
Music: Devaranjan
Editing: Beena Paul
Producer: Films Division

This meditative biographical film looks at the life and ideas of J. Krishnamurti. His writings and speeches on education, death and living are explored through interviews and his public interactions.

The earth is so beautiful, the sunsets, when you look at it, have extraordinary splendour, there is great beauty in a tree and a sheet of water has immense meaning; and a bird that's flying across the sky of an evening tells you a great deal if you know how to look...

*I maintain that Truth is a Pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect... Man cannot come to

it through any organization, through any creed, through any priest or ritual, not through any philosophical knowledge or psychological technique... Truth being limitless, unconditional, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path... Life is more important than any beliefs or dogmas, and to allow life its full fruition you must liberate it from beliefs, authority, and tradition.*

-J. Krishnamurti

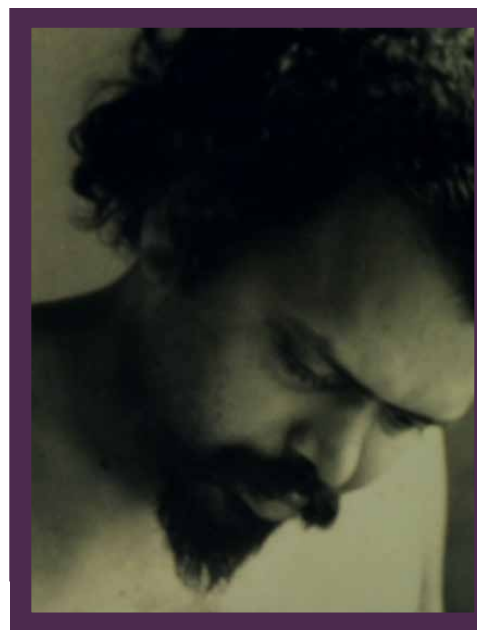


Anadi Dhara Documentary 1988 | 61 mins English

Concept and Realisation : G. Aravindan
Cinematographer : Shaji, Sunny Joseph, Rajesh Joshi, S.C. Padi, Ajit Padi, Shankar
Audiographer : G. Aravindan and Chandran
Editing : K.R. Bose
Producer : Films Division

A film on the folk dances of India. This film is not intended to list the various folk dance forms in different areas of the country since no single film can ever aspire to cover the sub-continent in its entirety. The approach adopted, therefore, is on a broad based classification and on the assumption that the folk dances of India are governed by a mood and method of their own with unlimited capacity to assimilate, improvise and to vibrate with vitality. This adaptability may be the basic reason for the manifestation and survival of these rich, multifaceted forms in circumstances otherwise changing quite fast and even unfavourable to their very existence.

Dancing is a search for truth, true identity through mind, imagination and the body. The body and its method of expression are important constituents for understanding the cultural patterns of a country. The folk dance forms are the roots of a country's cultural heritage. Like the varied colours of the landscape, the people and the costumes, the dance forms are myriad in number and infinite in expression. In the Indian context the folk dances are important indicators to the multilayered fabric of the cultural phenomenon characteristic of the country. They reflect a remarkable facet of the people, their genius to express through body kinetics all their aesthetic refinement.



A Dream Takes Wings: G. Aravindan | Documentary 1999 | 21 mins English

Direction, Script & Cinematography : Shaji N. Karun
Music : Issac Thomas Kottukapally
Editing : Sreekar Prasad
Sound : Krishnakumar
Producer : Films Division

The film is an exploration of the multi-faceted personality of G. Aravindan.

"Aravindan chettan was a poet, musician and artist who created a new aesthetics in Malayalam cinema, one that wove into its warp and weft the beauty of music, lines and verse. He was that rare man who was master of different streams of artistry and knew how to give shape to a sensibility that derived inspiration from all the arts."

Shaji N. Karun

Shaji Narayanan Karun (b. 1952)

Born in Perinad Taluk, Quilon district, Kerala. Graduated from the Film and Television Institute of India in cinematography in 1974. Long time collaborator with G. Aravindan, doing the cinematography for most of Aravindan's films. Also worked with K.G. George and M.T. Vasudevan Nair. Made his directorial debut with Piravi (The Birth / 1988), which was widely discussed in India and abroad. His camerawork (for Aravindan) virtually defines the look of



G Aravindan – Always a Contemporary

By C S Venkiteswaran

It is unbelievable that a quarter century has passed since Aravindan left us. His films continue to captivate us in all their freshness and creative vibrancy. In everything he did, whether it be cartooning, art direction, drawing, music, or film, Aravindan was able to make new connections, infuse a certain poignancy, a reflective pace and dignified individuality. It was evident right from the beginning of his creative life. His

cartoon series – Cheriya Manushyarum Valiya Lokavum (Small People,

Big World : 1963-71), one of the first graphic novels in India that appeared in Mathrubhumi weekly, were complete in themselves as individual pieces, but had characters, a milieu and a timescape that had a certain narrative cohesion and continuity. They consistently followed the inner conflicts and sociopolitical dilemmas of the time in very stark yet ironic brush strokes and textual flourishes.

His innovative renderings of plays like CN Sreekantan Nair's Kali and Kavalam Narayana Panicker's Avanavan Kadampa displayed his fine sense of mise en scene, a keen sensitivity about theatrical and performative

space that was marked by its minimalism and evocativeness.

Being trained in Hindustani music, Aravindan knew how to use music emotively and sparingly as is evident from the films for which he composed music for like Yaro Oral, Esthappan, Piravi and Ore Thooval Pakshikal. It was this keen sensitivity to all arts, accompanied by an intense engagement both with the senses and the intellect that gave his works haunting reverberations and unpredictable resonances. This ability to work with, through, and blend different mediums with ease gave his oeuvre a very distinct character and unique sensibility that is meditative yet deeply emotional.

In a career spanning nearly two decades, Aravindan created a body of cinematic works that occupies a very unique position in Indian cinema. His debut film Utharayanam made in 1975, was about the degeneration of nationalist hopes and ideals, the rising despondence of the youth and their frustrated dreams. From Utharayanam's political and idealist conflicts, Aravindan moved to the eternal dilemma of power and justice. Kanchanasita, based on a play by CN Sreekantan Nair, was a mythological of a different kind, one of the most innovative and experimental instance of adaptations in Indian cinema. It totally divested itself of all the adornments and paraphernalia that accompanied mythologicals and mythic figures like Rama that we are used to; everything is pared down to their essentials here to foreground the epic ethical questions it dealt with. His next film Thampu follow the various ripples

that a circus troupe creates in an otherwise placid village. Initially the villagers receive the new spectacle with great enthusiasm and awe, but they gradually lose interest, shifting their attention to other events in their circular yearly calendar. But during this brief but awe-filled interface between the static village and the mobile circus troupe, we come across several characters from both worlds. When the circus vehicle eventually leaves the village, a youth from the village joins them, leaving behind the stagnant village and family to seek new experiences and expressions. Kummatty, is a rare gem among childrens' films in India; it is a fable about a boy's brief excursion into the life of a dog. Like Thampu, here also the life in the idyllic village is touched by the magic of the bogeyman who turns the children playing with him into different animals and birds. Chindan's life as a dog and the return to human state, is a journey into the mystery of life

Esthapan is another exploration into world of local myths and mythmaking. Set in the Latin Catholic coastal community, the film follows the legends that surround a mysterious wanderer named Esthapan. People weave diverse stories about him: for some he is a seer and healer, for others a thief, or a crook. Esthapan is the medium through which the villagers explain and understand the imponderables and injustices of life; he embodies their justifications about life, their hopes, frustrations, fears and dreams. Pokkuveyil, in a way, takes the theme of Utharayanam further. It is about the gradual falling apart of a sensitive young poet, whose inner and outer worlds crumble without any hope of redemption

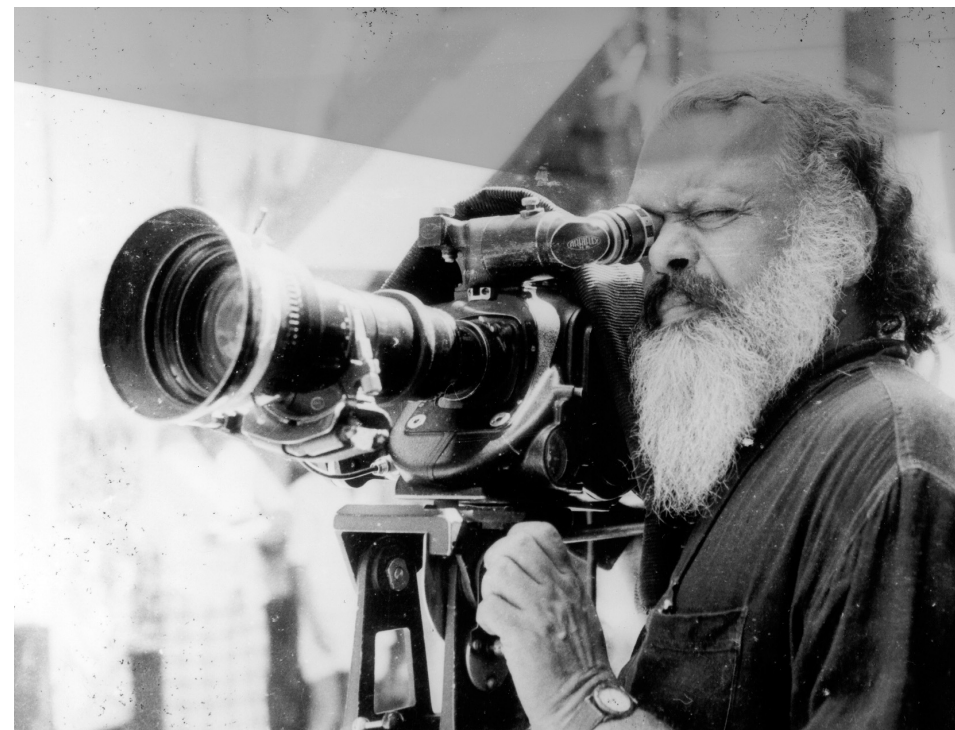


or overcoming. Interestingly, the film was shot to the 'accompaniment' of music that is set in rag shubhapanthuvarali rag rendered in sarod by Rajiv Taranath and in flute by Hariprasad Chaurasia.

Chidambaram, based on a story by CV Sreeraman, is a poignant elaboration upon the theme of innocence and guilt; about how an act of infidelity – towards oneself and the others - traumatizes life; how an unethical move overturns the founding justifications of life. In Oridathu, Aravindan deals with the idea of relentless 'progress' and its demonic potentials. Here, the agent of change, in the form of electricity, arrives in a village, wreaking havoc in the fabric of its life. His next film – Marattam - weaves

several narrative strands together: that of storytelling, performance, memory and legends. This story within story narrative is about the boundaries between actor and acting, performance and reality, evidence and fact, story and truth. His last film Vastuhara, looks at the theme of dispossession from various angles; at one level the film is about displacement and exile forced by Partition, at another level, it is also about how we too dispossess each other, emotionally and otherwise.

Likewise, his documentaries too were several explorations into the creative processes and spiritual journeys like The Seer who Walks Alone on the philosopher J Krishnamurthy, Contours of Linear Rhythm on



artist Nambudiri, Anadi dhara on various folk art forms in India, and Sahaja on the idea of ardha-nariswara.

In film after film, he excavated new experiential terrains, unfolded new connections, transgressed boundaries between genres, forms and styles. In a way, one can also look at his films as creative dialogue between different mediums, of different art forms conversing with each other, probing at and extending boundaries, and creating a new, synergistic aesthetic engagements.

The greatness of an artist is in the aesthetic core of his/her works that acquires new dimensions with each viewing; it grows in time, with the viewer, or grows with

time, in the viewer. They do not get dated, but acquire complex maturity along with us all the time revealing new layers of meaning and emotional folds that outlive the ravages of time.

In that sense, Aravindan will always remain a contemporary.

Venkiteswaran Chittur Subramanian is an Indian film critic, professor, documentary filmmaker and writer from Chalakudi, Kerala. He won the National Film Award for Best Film Critic in 2009.

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The Poet of Revelations - Filmmaker as an Intuitive Artist

Interview with G.Aravindan

By Chandradasan

Chandradaasan: You directed your first film, UTTARAYANAM in 1974. Can you tell us a little about the period before that and how the experiences of those years influenced the present film maker that you are?

G. Aravindan: I was interested in cinema from the very beginning - my childhood days, my student days - as far back as I can remember. I saw a lot of films with my friends and I used to read whatever available literature on films and discuss them whenever possible. However, it was only after the International Film Festival in 1954, that I got a chance to view films like RASHOMON, and BICYCLE THIEVES. These films were different. It was like a revelation... It opened up another possibility, another side of cinema, another sensibility, which did not exist until then... Well, I passed B. Sc. with distinction. My subject was Botany. I got a good job with the Rubber Board, and hence discontinued my academic pursuits. During my years with the Rubber Board I had to work on different locations in Kerala like Calicut, Kothamangalam, Trivandrum etc. Those days I used to paint in oil and watercolors - most of them were portraits and paint-

ings of animals. I had also' taken part in group exhibitions of paintings. Another fascination was music - in my childhood. I was 'introduced to classical music, which I studied for a long time. While working in Calicut I learned Hindustani from Sharat Chandra Rai.

A good cinema is like any other works of art, like painting, dance, theatre, literature etc. No work of art directly or indirectly change society or human beings. However cinema has the power to influence the human mind. Talking about good cinema... I believe that any act of a human being committed with sincerity and conviction is good. So is the case with cinema, if it is born out of one's conviction, it cannot but be good.

Chandradasan -How was the family atmosphere... was it encouraging?

Aravindan - I had a very free family atmosphere. My father, (advocate Govindan Nair) was a writer himself. He has never restricted me in any way. Though I used to go home several times late in the night - mostly after seeing films, he never scolded me. I used to read a bit too. Though I did not understand them completely, those days I acquainted myself with Sartre and Camus. I was also familiar with many well-known literary figures of Kerala, who I met either at home or through the Sahitya Parishat. Some of the famous contemporary writers in Kerala today, like O N V Kurupu, Thirunallur Karunakaran, Sugatha Kumari, N Mohanan etc. are my classmates.

Adoor Gopalakrishnan came back from the Film Institute and started the Chitralekha Film Society. I co-operated with that attempt - I think it was in 1962 or in 1963.

It was at this time that an All India Writers Conference was organised by FACT in Ernakulam. It was a very big event. Nothing like that has happened before or after that in India. The whole programme was organised by M K K. Nair and M Govindan. Adoor was incharge of the Film section and I was incharge of the painting section. After this I started a Film Society in Kottayam, then later when I was transferred to Calicut I started another Film Society in Calicut. I did not miss any Hollywood Film that got released in the town. My association with film gradually grew and continued on these lines.

Chandradasan - When did you start drawing cartoons?

Aravindan - I used to draw from the student days and a few were published in some small magazines. In 1961, I sent some to the 'Mathrubhoomi' Weekly. They published that. That year, Shri N V Krishna Variyar, the Editor of 'Mathrubhoomi' asked me to contribute regularly to the weekly. From then for a period of 18 years continuously I have done cartoons for 'Mathrubhoomi' under the title of "Small Men (people) and Big World": I discontinued it only because I was not finding time to send the cartoons every week on time for publication.

Chandradasan - Now we see your cartoons in Kalakaumudi weekly under the title 'A Birds eye view'

Aravindan - That is not a regular assignment. A regular assignment may not be possible for me. It is only once in a while when I get time that I do cartoons.

Chandradasan - You also seem to have a keen interest in Drama?

Aravindan - Yes -I used to see a lot of theatre in my childhood. However, a more serious approach to theatre developed in me because of Shri C N Sreekantan Nair. In Kottayam we formed a Theatre Association called 'Navarangam'. The members used to meet every Sunday for play reading, discussions and to learn a little acting. That interest in drama still continues. Today I am associated with the 'Sopanam' theatre under the guidance of Kavalam Narayana Panikar. Though my role in it is minimal, I am interested in the cultural activity of the 'Sopanam'.

Chandradasan - How did you move from regular cartooning and drama to cinema?

Aravindan - My first film was a sheer accident. I was in Calicut involved, in the film society and had been staying alone. My room was a kind of 'den' for friends to come together for a chat and a drink etc. Theekodayil had prepared a script and all of us were trying hard to get it financed for making a film. Suddenly one day Pattathuvila Karunakaran said that he will finance the film, if I, Aravindan, directed it. I told him that I had no formal academic qualification for directing a film; All I had was some ideas through seeing films and reading about them. Pattathuvila said: 'that is enough'. And that is how I became a filmmaker.

Chandradasan - Has composing cartoons, the way you developed cartoon characters, helped you in some way while shooting and directing films?



Aravindan - I have not felt anything like that. To tell you the truth, my cartoons are not such meticulously executed works. Most of the time one draws and gives in the work at the last moment. I had simplified the whole thing to, two characters in a frame with a visual dimension. Earlier I used to place the characters against a very clear backdrop. Later it became just two characters with a few lines here and there. I don't think I have drawn much from this kind of work for directing films. There is also no relationship between the camera/cinema frame and cartoon frames. I do not essentially believe that if you are a painter, a composer or a cartoonist it will help you in making films.

Chandradasan - Can you tell us a little about your methodology of directing films? Do you prepare a detailed script-sketch of each shot?

Aravindan - I do it in either of the two ways: sometimes everything is planned before. But even then there is no elaborate shooting script. Most of the time I work with a loosely knit shooting script. Several times a lot of changes are made and some shots are totally abandoned. My scripts usually have the flexibility to take care of such eventualities. I don't have pre-fixed frame. I have not felt the need for such planning. In fact I am afraid of such a pre-conceived frame and doubt its advantages. Compositions might be bad for making a film. The shots can become rigid and the composition very formalistic. I feel a flexible approach in these matters bring better results... Well, different filmmakers adopt different methods. No one can say which is better and which is right. This has to be left to each

individuals' taste.

Chandradasan - Perhaps you are conscious about the colors you want and carry within you an overall idea about the kind of shots you are going to make, which allows you flexibility within your script.

Aravindan - Perhaps... But in MARATTAM my film under production, I have not used any colors consciously. I have used costumes and colors which were around and available. I have not decided that a particular character will have this or that costume or this or that color.

Yet there is a lot of green and red (colors of the earth) in your films. Red earth and greenery is what we are surrounded with. I have tried to use nature more than a backdrop only in KANCHANA SEETA. In KANCHANA SEETA nature is a character.

Chandradasan - Though you say that you used nature as a backdrop there seems to be a lot of it in your films for example in the film POKKUYEYIL, the use of landscape in twilight.

Aravindan - I have used landscape in POKKUYEYIL to create a required mood. No landscape is used as characterization.

Chandradasan - However, when I watch your films, I cannot but get a feeling that the abundant use and depiction of landscape and nature make them a little more than mere backdrop...it seems to have another function... another purpose...

Aravindan - I have heard many speaking about it and seen a few writing about it in that way. There was no conscious effort

from my side to make the landscape carry another function.

Chandradasan - In the period between 1960 and 1974, you said that you were engaged primarily with paintings, film societies, drawing cartoons etc. I have heard that you were also interested in murals.

Aravindan - Yes,... my artist friend, A Ramachandran came back from Shantiniketan. His thesis was a study on murals, and I was moving around with him helping him in whatever way I could. Because of that I got a chance to learn about the characteristics of murals and differences between them. The thesis was a major work by A Ramachandran.

Chandradasan - Apart from the knowledge you gained from the study of murals you seem to be influenced by its narrative style - which is essentially flexible; its loose dramatic structure, stretches and contracts space according to requirement. The character portrayal is also done in a similar fashion. What scenes and which character should assume prominence is totally determined by the mood of the artist.

Aravindan - This we find not only in murals, but it is a feature of our tradition. It is there in our paintings and sculptures, which are not three-dimensional. This is not peculiar only to India but is the basic characteristic of South East Asian region. The depiction of the eyes, the lines, the figure proportions etc., is totally different from that of the Western conception.

Chandradasan - This flexibility of characterization is there in every art form of ours,

e.g. in our way of storytelling; the intense moments and climaxes are left to the mood of the storyteller. With the result the storyteller sometimes highlights relatively ordinary episodes as the central events.

Aravindan - Yes, this is not only true of our story telling styles, but also of our stories; take for example, the Panchatantram stories. They flow spontaneously without having a unifying structure.

Chandradasan - This kind of a narrative style seems to be a special feature of your films as well, especially of the films ES-THEPPAN, POKKUYEYIL, KUMMATTY. You have already told us that you don't have a formal training in directing films nor do you maintain any rigid standards. You are not following particularly any film theory in your films. Is it because you have accepted the narrative style of our tradition? Are they an effort to develop a film language from our cultural tradition?

Aravindan - I have not deliberately thought about such issues. The departures made from the Western ways are not conscious either. The Western ways of character analysis, introducing conflict and tension and the foreline, which controls all such notions does not go with our way of thinking, our tradition. Cinema is a lately developed Western idiom. It had a form as soon as it was born. How I have freed myself from these Western influences is not something that I have thought about. Nor am I sure about whether I have come out of Western influences. I don't base myself on any ideology or theory and analyze the how and the why of it all. Maybe this was possible because I have not undergone a formal



training in filmmaking. Many influences are there. What I have seen and heard; what I have read; what friends discussed with me.

Chandradasan - I want to go back and ask you another question. Do you like our classics like Kathakali?

Aravindan - Every year, there used to be a Kathakali performance at the temple until daybreak. I used to watch them casually and was not seriously interested in it. As I said earlier my main interest was music.

Chandradasan - When and how did you get interested in Indian philosophy?

Aravindan - I cannot say that I have an in-depth knowledge of Indian philosophy. The basic concepts of Indian philosophy are part of all of us. Something that we live and breathe every day. This interest in Indian philosophy was born and grew with my reading habit. Within Indian philosophy what fascinated me most was Buddhism of which I have read more. My association with Jiddu Krishnamurthy also helped in deepening my interest and sensibilities.

Chandradasan - Well, I asked you this because your films are closely linked to Indian philosophy and tradition...

Aravindan - Mine is not a conscious effort. I very much like people who make departures from the mainstream-people who are critical of the dominant way of thinking, taste, and habits. I try listening to them to understand their flight from reality. Some of them make some kind of a departure from the mainstream but keep an active

link with it. Some make the departures and live it out - the yet to be. I observe these things. These form my knowledge and my works reflect the knowledge, the feelings, the dilemmas, I have absorbed.

Chandradasan - Your films carry a mysticism intrinsically linked to Nature. From the film UTHARAYANAM to ORIDATH, this is visible. Perhaps we can leave out ORIDATH. It is different from other films. ORIDATH deals with the transformation and convulsions of a village society due to an event, In all other films it is individuals and individual conflicts which are central, for instance, UTHARAYANAM, towards the end, the voyage into the forest, the meeting with the old woman, her guileless laughter, her kindness, and the mask which is burnt in the fire...; the title CHIDAMBARAM, the journey of Shankaran, Shankaran's internal conflict, his effort to re-establish himself into the routine of life, his failures, the doctor's advice to him to read the Gita, his haunting conscience and encounters with friends and strangers and finally, his entry into the Chidambaram temple where his elements blend and fuse into the invincibility of the temple. This search for the inviolable and eternal by the individual in the essences of Nature seems to be at the core of your films. There seems to be a continuity in the search for the spiritual in the realms of the ordinary and mundane... That is why I repeat the question.

Aravindan - I have not done anything consciously. How it is like that... I don't know. I was interested in the kind of issues you are talking about quite early in life. Though not very seriously, like a lot of youngsters,

I thought of becoming a Sanyasi (pause) Perhaps I could have. There were possibilities...once I had decided seriously.

Chandradasan - When did you get attracted to Buddhism?

Aravindan - I got attracted to Buddhism when working at Kothamangalam. I had to travel a lot to different estates as an Inspector from the Rubber Board. Yet, I was terribly alone...isolated... but for the presence of an artist friend... It was sometime in the fifties or early sixties. This is the context in which Buddhism fascinated me.

Chandradasan - How did you respond to the social and political questions and changes of that time? After all it was a period of great political ferment in Kerala. The formation of the first government of the Communist Party of India, the subsequent development of opposition to it, which is generally termed as "the liberation" struggle and the dismissal of the Communist Government by the Centre etc.

Aravindan - I was not an activist. But my emotional response was intense. Some of the activists of the Communist movement were my friends. During the student days Shri.D M Pottakkad had stayed with me-this revolutionary and writer was being hunted by the police then. As a government employee, I could not act openly, so there were limitations. While I was positively sympathetic to the Communist movement, I was not a Party activist.

Chandradasan - After that you went through a period of cynicism, which is clearly evident in your cartoon series, 'Ramu and

Guruji'. How did it happen?

Aravindan - Ramu and Guruji are fictional characters. They never lived nor are they derived with reference to anyone. They are just concepts. The cynicism had a very definite social basis - the post-independence socio-political realities, the rising expectations of the people, the poverty and unemployment, the double standards, the denied opportunities, (the witch hunting of communists for instance), difficulties in getting admission into the universities and colleges. I think this cynicism was shared by a lot of youngsters of the time... it is clearly reflected in the literature, the stories, and poems of the period...

Chandradasan - Well, the beginning of this cynicism was evident in the cartoon series "Cheriy Manushyaram Valiya lokaum" (small people and big world). What one sees is a continuity and growth of this thinking.

Aravindan - When I started the cartoon series, it was just a situation of an unemployed youth. Later I thought this young man should have a character. So he became a sensitive young man. Subsequently many other characters like 'Ramu and Guruji' began to grow and get corrupted a bit by worldly wisdom. Then began a self-justification process and a willingness to adjust with the social realities. Thus the character 'Ramu' was slowly developing.

Chandradasan - I know you also as a play director. One of the best plays I have seen is AVANAVAN KADAMBA directed by you. Have you directed any other plays?

Aravindan - Well, I directed KADAMBA



after my first film. It was in 1976 or 1977. Before that, in 1964, I had directed C N Sreekantan Nair's play KALI (Anger) for a professional troupe. It was a disaster. The audience reacted terribly and the play had to be stopped half way.

Chandradasan - One can say that KALI was the first experimental play in Malayalam. Why do you think it turned out to be a disaster?

Aravindan - KALI had too many limitations. First of all it was not suited for a professional troupe. Secondly when the professional troupe was staging, it turned out that it could not be 'professionally experimental'. I think there were problems in the script of the play itself. I think Shri C N Sreekantan Nair wanted to revise the play.

Chandradasan - Can you tell us about direction AVANAVAN KADAMBA? What was the approach you adopted?

Aravindan - I cannot say that the play was solely directed by me. I evolved with the effort and contributions of a number of a people, like for instance, the playwright Kavalam Narayana Panikar. We also had a number of very good artists like Nedumudi Venu, Jaganathan, Gopi, Natarajan, Kunjupillai and others. Shri Paramashivan helped us with the choreography. Everybody had agreed to stage the play in the open instead of on a stage. For this purpose, I prepared a general outline based on the play, with a chart of formations, groupings, choreography etc. AVANAVAN KADAMBA initiated, for the first time in Malayalam theatre, a process of using folk form elements. We were not using folk

forms as they are. The effort was to fuse various folk elements in the movements, chanting, narrative techniques, steps and rhythms to evolve a totally new form. A lot of suggestions and contributions facilitated this process. I was coordinating these efforts.

Chandradasan Let me come back to films. You said that you made your films based on your experience. Were you influenced by any particular film theory/concept?

Aravindan - I don't think I was influenced by any particular school of thought. What influenced me more was theatre and music. We are, I feel, working with a totally Western idiom, using the same techniques and the same chemistry. Can we evolve a new form, new sensibility using the same? Ketan Mehta has tried it in BHAVANI BHAVAI. This is something that we have to try. Using that idiom to evolve a form of our own is not easy. I have tried this in MARATOM my new film.

Chandradasan - BHAVANI BHAVAI is evidently influenced by Jansco's film concept and camera work?

Aravindan - It is possible. These are the initial stages, the beginnings... there is a reliance on East European style. He also used Bhavai theatre in that film.

Chandradasan - What do you think of NOKKUKUTHI directed by Mankada Ravi Varma?

Aravindan - I have not had an opportunity to see that film.

Chandradasan - Talking about film theory and criticism, John Abraham once said that the film critic's approach to cinema is rooted in the literary tradition, while what we actually need is a visual approach.

Aravindan - What John said is right. The main reason for such an approach is that most of our film critics are also literary critics - some of them being writers themselves. In cinema as well as in theatre, this is the state of affairs. It is sad that what they write becomes the last word. Their notions and tastes are determined by literary excellences, and literary standards. Such film comments become superficial and external to cinema. Only music and painting have so far evaded the dominating clutches of the writers. A new language of film writing seems to be gradually emerging.

Chandradasan - What is your idea of good cinema?

Aravindan - A good cinema is like any other works of art, like painting, dance, theatre, literature etc. No work of art directly or indirectly change society or human beings. However cinema has the power to influence the human mind. Talking about good cinema... I believe that any act of a human being committed with sincerity and conviction is good. So is the case with cinema, if it is born out of one's conviction, it cannot but be good.

UTTARAYANAM (Throne of Capricorn)
Chandradasan - I would like to ask some questions specifically about each of your works. We did have some discussion generally on form and content. You had already stated that you don't have a formalistic approach to film making. Therefore if I

ask you about why you used a particular color in a particular shot or why you edited a shot in that particular way, I suppose it may not be relevant.

Aravindan - Yes, you are right. I don't think, one can attribute any given meaning to a form. E.g. to say that a given color in a given shot and situation means specifically a meaning, a value, is irrelevant. If the color red means, blood, danger and revolution that will remind us only of Velichappadu. According to belief, within the sun's cycle, the best movement of the sun is uttarayanam - which is the time the sun moves to the north. Symbolically this becomes Ravi's own uttarayanam i.e.-a journey or movement into the forest - where he finds his peace/reconciliation.

Chandradasan - The central theme (issue) of your first film UTTARAYANAM is unemployment, as also reminiscences of some people who took active part in the independence movement. What was your approach to the very contemporary issues dealt with in the film?

Aravindan - The scriptwriter Thikkodyan is a person very committed to social and political issues. He has been active in the 'movement' too. But I don't believe that one can fulfil one's social commitment by shooting a film, I do not think that with one film we are going to change society or influence the thinking of the people much. What I am arriving at is, that the subject, the content of a film is not central. The superficial sentiments expressed through the theme cannot really influence the people. What goes into the human mind is the subtleties and it is that which ticks.



Chandradasan - In the last scene of the film, Ravi (the main character) goes to the forest, where he meets with an old woman. This character seems to have transformed Ravi so much that he removes his mask and throws it into the fire.

Aravindan - I had conceived the character Ravi as a person who was unsure about returning from the forest - this is evident at the point when he stands at the entrance to the forest thinking about what to do. Later he meets with the elderly woman and they understand each other, perfectly. Here the quality of innocence predominates for it is there (in the film) that Ravi smiles for the first time. This is because he could spontaneously respond to the smile of the old lady with whom he could identify his own state of being. In our context, fire is purifying: Throwing the mask into the fire where the old woman was warming herself was an act of purification, on which note I ended my film.

Chandradasan - I do not think it will be relevant to ask what he will do after the purification! What I would like to ask though is that, in spite of your emphasis on Indian tradition, you have not become ritualistic. Kurosawa for instance is a film maker who carves out characters from the Samurai tradition and the treatment of the characters e.g. the way they move, talk, draw their swords etc. are very ritualistic, shorn of any flexibility. In comparison, your treatment of tradition is neither religious nor ritualistic. Can we call it humanistic or romantic?

Aravindan - Since Kurosawa was born in a Samurai family, their movements and

rituals are in his blood. But every ritual has its rigidity; each act has its signs and codes. This does not go with my concept of cinema. Flexibility is of utmost importance to me.

Chandradasan - In this film you have also brought in political activists, a group of extremists and a master who can be called Gandhian.

Aravindan - They were characters from real life. The extremist Achu, in UTHARAYANAM is Kunjiraman Kidavu, who has been involved in the Pizhalur bombing case. Kelappan, the father of Kunjiraman was a Gandhian. Kunjiraman was there with us for the entire shooting.

We shot those sequences with a lot of realism, with a great deal of accuracy. There is not even one element of fiction. While the form in its totality is of course fictitious, these kinds of details are an actual documentation. Why we have done this, I don't exactly know. It is just that I felt one need not necessarily fictionalise and dramatise such social events.

While Kunjiraman was an extremist and his father a Gandhian, they had respect and love for each other. There was no enmity and disrespect as you see today. This respect and love for each other I have maintained in the film as well. The script-writer had a close association with the people and the actual events.

Chandradasan - We spoke earlier of your experience and perceptions as a cartoonist. How has this experience specifically been reflected in UTHARAYANAM? Some influences are there in the characterizations.

The main characters in UTTARAYANAM are an unemployed youngster (Ravi) and an idealist, the 'Master'. 'Cheriy Manushyaran Valiya Lokaum' also carried two such characters (Ramu and Guruji). While I think there is some relationship between the two, it is not deliberate. I simply could not get out of the influence of years of cartooning. However these characters were an integral part of the original script- in which there was this explosive dramatic situation, where the son was about to kill the father. Thikkodyan (the script writer) being a playwright himself let the theatre elements prevail in the script. I removed these elements, and made the film more visual.

Chandradasan -The film proceeds on the plane of realistic narration till the very end when it moves into the world of mysticism.

Aravindan - I have tried to give a logical progression towards this end, which is not a sudden development. Earlier Ravi meets a European Sanyasi. Think of the scene of him leaving home - his mother is crying, he has set off without even saying good bye to her; this is not just a trip - it is the 'movement'. This kind of leaving home and getting involved in movements are a common occurrence in our culture. There are many scenes before that, in the film where Ravi says farewell. Hence there was already a suggestion of what was to come.

Chandradasan - Is the title UTTARAYANAM connected to the sun?

Aravindan - Yes, according to belief, within the sun's cycle, the best movement of the sun is uttarayanam - which is the time the

sun moves to the north. Symbolically this becomes Ravi's own uttarayanam i.e.-a journey or movement into the forest - where he finds his peace/reconciliation. KANCHANA SEETA

Chandradasan Your second film, KANCHANA SEETA is based on the play of C N Sreekantan of the same title. The play's main features were its very eloquent, long and authoritative dialogues, whereas your film is almost silent. It is really interesting - the change from eloquent dialogue to an eloquent silence.

Aravindan - There are some specific reasons for deciding to have sparse dialogues in KANCHANA SEETHA. One, this episode taken from Ramayan is familiar to all. Two, Ramayana is not a supernatural reality for us, as it is ingrained in us. It is therefore not necessary to educate people about the film through lengthy dialogues. C N had made clear the prakrithi-purusha notion in Ramayana. I did not think that Seetha should come in the film in the form of a woman. That is why Seetha appeared in the film as prakrithi (Nature) and Prakrithi is a character in the film. When the emotions of Seeta like pain, sadness, joy, and equanimity are manifested through the moods of Prakrithi, dialogue becomes redundant. I felt I could make the film without dialogue. Rama committing suicide - (I still feel it was - self-immolation) had haunted me very badly. With all these, my KANCHANA SEETA became very different. Words were required only for very essentials. The dialogues, which I used, were from C N's play. The doubt I had then was whether my Rama and Lakshmana (as they were ordinary people) could use such



an eloquent Sanskritised language. I did not think that Seeta should come in the film in the form of a woman. That is why Seetha appeared in the film as Prakrithi (Nature) and Prakrithi is a character in the film. When the emotions of Seeta like pain, sadness, joy, and equanimity are manifested through the moods of Prakrithi, dialogue becomes redundant.

Chandradasan - Was Rama really committing suicide?

Aravindan - Yes... in all probability. That is what I think. However his death in Sarayu River is not like any other kind of death. It was a Mahaprasthanam - an event of supreme self-sacrifice and purification, leaving everything behind. Everyone dear to him had gone. He had parted from Lakshman... he was troubled by many guilt feelings - the murder of Sambuka, the unfairness meted out to Seetha... Towards the end of the film, this mood prevails - Rama walks into the Sarayu river with the sacrificial fire, bearing everything including his loneliness, calling out for Seetha ... and disappears into the depths of the waters, carrying the sacrificial fire with him into the river is not in Ramayana - it is an interpretation.

Somehow the part I liked most in the film is this end. A few unexpected things happened for the good while shooting this last scene, for instance the unexpected early morning mist on the banks of Godavari, which is really rare occurrence, made the whole scene absolutely ethereal.

Chandradasan - In the process you have reaffirmed life's essential bondage with fire

and water, a concept deeply embedded in our philosophy, our culture and lifestyle. A recurring theme in fact, in all your films, is this interaction, merger and unification of the basic elements of life the panchabhoota. Now let me ask you about the concept of Stree as prakrithi. The Hindu (Indian) perception of prakrithi is very subtle. From Bhrama purusha is born; from purusha evolves prakrithi. What you have done is weave into these limitless horizons, an all-encompassing vision of life in visual with a great deal of authenticity. The totality of your visuals takes us to a realm of meaning beyond the immediate. How have you been able to achieve this?

Aravindan - What a good writer achieves with the imaginative use of language, cinema has to achieve with visuals. It is here that one recognizes the limitations of technology and equipment available. I made this film with very simple equipment like table fans to rustle the leaves. If I had better equipment, I could have done a better job. Yet I have been able to create these subtleties to some extent in my visuals. However, I do know that it had to be much more cohesive and intense, Rama, Luv and Kusha, are all an essential part of Nature. This has not emerged as well as I would have liked and there are times when they remain as suspended images.

Chandradasan Let me ask you another question regarding the characterisation of Rama and Lakshmana. The prevalent ideas today about the epic and other characters in Hindu mythology are largely formed by the calendar pictures of Raja Ravivarma. Your Rama and Lakshmana are different. Rama has a paunch. Lakshmana has got

pockmarks on his face. Why did you do this? What have you achieved through such a treatment?

Aravindan - In my opinion Ravi Varma has distorted a lot that was Indian painting tradition - he does not even seem to possess the simple sensibilities of painting which even an illustrator has. He has not even done a good study of portraiture. His compositions are static and the colors employed are terrible. I do not consider him a painter. I did not like his works from the beginning. Another thing is that our sculptures are large in size and exude strength and vitality, which is absent in murals. The Rama of KANCHANA SEETA exudes the strength and vitality of our sculptures. He is not just a plain frontal image. The wandering tribals we encounter here and there with their medicines also share this quality. I enquired and found that these people are settled in villages near the Godavari River. Apart from this they also believe that they belong to the same race. That is why I cast two of them in my film.

Chandradasan - Should we take such faith and belief literally?

Aravindan - It is not necessary to do so. However their faith, their physique and mannerisms attracted me. Whether right or wrong, their faith has a basic tribal purity. The name of each village chief is Ramadas. The tribal, who acted as Rama is also a village chief. Transcending the rightness or validity of such beliefs, what we have to acknowledge and understand is the energy and liveliness of such a faith.

Chandradasan - Well, thereby you have

shorn Rama and Lakshmana of their divine magnanimity.

Aravindan - I have deliberately not given a super human quality to Rama and Lakshmana. Only when they interact with Nature do they rise to the levels of God and go beyond the ordinary. Otherwise they would have been the same as anybody else.

Chandradasan Diametrically opposed to this, you have given Valmiki a very beautiful form and made him say to Rama that "all human beings are equal".

Aravindan - The Valmiki of my film is not an ordinary tribal; he is a visionary and a poet. So I have given him an appropriate form and beauty - a form, which pervades the beauty and purity of the soul all around. Valmiki, the poet, stands up to Rama on matters of principles. The poets of all ages should be questioning the injustices of their times. By the way, the dubbing for Valmiki was done by John Abraham.

Chandradasan - Can you explain how you brought the Shambuka story into the film?

Aravindan - The Shambuka episode is brought in at the very beginning of the film. Rama meets Shambuka because Vasishta has ordered him to do so. Meditation has been made taboo for the lower castes. Rama feels the weight of his guilt. Shambuka's wife falls at the feet of Rama pleading with him not to kill her husband. This is where Rama feels the presence of Seetha hinted at and represented through some visuals of Nature. Rama looks up. I have repeated the same music and recreated the varying moods of nature whenever Rama



experiences the presence of Seetha. Hence, I have used the Shambuka episode to highlight Rama's troubled conscience and evoke within him and the film the memory and presence of Seetha.

THAMBU (Tent)

Chandradasan - When you planned the film THAMBU, what was uppermost in your mind: was it the problems and insecurities of the circus artists or the response of the villagers to the circus tent?

Aravindan - I planned THAMBU as a documentary feature. The film was shot in Thirunavaya on the banks of Bharathapuzha. I came to this village with ten to fifteen circus artistes who had already left their circus company. We did not have a script, and we shot the incidents as they happened. What we did on the first day was to call all the villagers and perform a circus act for them. There were a lot of people who had not seen a circus before. We shot their responses as they were watching. We did not ask them to do anything. After the initial hesitation, they forgot the lights and the shooting and completely got involved in the circus. It was all very original. At that time the village was also getting ready for the Ayappan Vilaku festival, which we used in the film. Finally the whole village got so involved in preparing for its festival, they lost their interest in the circus. The film ends there. In fact it is a location film.

We did not have a script, and we shot the incidents as they happened. What we did on the first day was to call all the villagers and perform a circus act for them. There were a lot of people who had not seen a

circus before. We shot their responses as they were watching. We did not ask them to do anything. After the initial hesitation, they forgot the lights and the shooting and completely got involved in the circus. It was all very original.

Chandradasan - Well, in THAMBU also, there is a discontented young man.

Aravindan - This character was there in the film - young man from an upper middle class family returned from abroad and settled in the native land. I am fascinated by these kind of people. You see similar people in UTTARAYANAM also. This 'return' has been with us for a very very long time. Earlier people 'returned' from Singapore, Burma, Ceylon etc. Now they 'return' from the Gulf. That is the only difference. When they 'come back' they will build a big bungalow and live isolated from the others around. Their relationships are confined to those of similar 'type' - they will of course have their "weekend gatherings". The question is why do they 'come back' if they are unable to or do not want to mix with the people around? My young man is someone who is discontented with this sort of isolation and wants to be in tune with the people and surroundings. He does not like to sit at home. He starts learning to read Malayalam and then ask the circus whether he can join them and ultimately goes away with them.

Chandradasan - Just a small comment.

Although apparently 'regional', your films, one could say are much broader - Indian. Your comments on contemporary issue reflect more a cynicism towards the present (as in your cartoons) than a nostalgic

return to the past. To get back to the film - the young man has never been to see a circus, has he?

Aravindan - No. When the circus goes back he just goes along with them.

Chandradasan - When a circus is on the move, the artists are resting or asleep. They have nothing to expect or remember from the places they visit or stay in. This young man takes a decision to go with them. Why? Perhaps a recognition that he is no different from them! Or is this decision merely coincidental?

Aravindan - He could not get along with his family. To escape the home atmosphere he goes and finds a place under the Banyan tree and learns to read etc. I have included in the film the moment of his decision to join the circus.

At home he was surrounded by rock music while he himself loves classical music. There you see him asking the circus to take him along. The circus manager tells him to get into the van. At that moment he has not identified himself with the circus - he is merely escaping from his environment. No one has taken note of him in the circus company. The film ends with the sequence of him sleeping by the side of the circus clown.

Chandradasan - For the circus, this journey is a stagnation. A period of rest, where as for the young man this trip is a progress and escape.

Aravindan - We cannot really say predict what he will become or do... He could be-

come anything...even a circus clown... We are not making it clear. The emphasis is on his escape from the immediate environment.

Chandradasan - As you are talking about the journey of the young man, it occurs to me that all your films have this aspect of a voyage to self-discovery or a 'movement' towards betterment of humanity. e.g. in KANCHANA SEETA, Rama carrying the sacrificial fire and going into the Sarayu River; in UTTARAYANAM, Ravi going into the forest; the arrivals and departures of the bogeyman in KUMMATTI according to the seasons; in CHIDAMBARAM Shankaran Kutty's search for peace in his troubled conscience etc. Your films seem to be myriad manifestations of the deep desire of human kind for answers, peace, meaning...?

Aravindan - (Remains silent)
KUMMATTY

Chandradasan - You have directed KUMMATTY as a children's film. Can we really categorize it as such?

Aravindan - Yes I think we can. What I have come to know is that the children who saw the film liked it. This film was appreciated in Japan and also screened in Channel 4 of BBC. Due to a lack of proper distribution system, this film could not be shown properly in India.

Kummatty's is a dual persona. A real personality and an assumed one. If he is not this he will remain just as an idea. And if he remains as a concept he will not fit into the essence of the story. I wanted to show



that apart from his supernatural image he is also real.

Chandradasan While you were shooting for this film, did you give any special attention to the structure and details keeping in mind that it is oriented towards children?

Aravindan - I have adopted a narrative style, which might interest the children and kept a positive ending. The story is like a folklore, which the children can easily identify with. The music and landscapes were chosen specially, keeping children in mind.

Chandradasan - Can you tell us a little about KUMMATTY?

Aravindan - KUMMATTY arrives like the seasons. He represents spring. He comes in fact in spring when the rain is over and the plants are green and in bloom. KUMMATTY is part of that Nature.

Chandradasan - Yes, in the film KUMMATTY seems to emerge from Nature...

Aravindan - KUMMATTY comes alive on to the screen from a vanishing point and disappears into a dissolve. In a sense therefore, he comes back from where he disappeared. The landscape in these scenes is also special.

Chandradasan - Why is that?

Aravindan - Though the landscape is that of Kerala, in KUMMATTY it is not 'a typical' landscape. It has extensive vacant land with a few trees here and there; very few houses and little human habitation; people are very simple. I thought the lonely lanes

and the solitude of the landscape will contribute to the film. We cannot say that a KUMMATTY is coming to a familiar place where there are a lot of people. For this story we needed a functional backdrop. What is unusual in our context is a commonplace occurrence in film. That is to say we constructed a reality out of the unreal. For example the boy Chintan transforms into a dog but he continues to live in his house. He is still treated as a son.

Chandradasan - The dog Chintan loses his way as he wanders and bumps into a wealthy family.

Aravindan - Yes, and they send him off from there saying he has no pedigree. From there he returns home. In the beginning he is treated like a son. After sometime the family accepts it as a fact that he is 'transformed' into a dog. His friends see him on their way to school. At this moment he has communication only with the bird in the cage, which responds to the sounds he produces. This is also the time he becomes aware of 'bondage'. As soon as he recovers his human form he releases the bird from the cage. You should also remember that he used to hurt this bird earlier. In his own experience of bondage he understood the bondage of the 'Other'. This experience redefines his ideas and attitudes.

Chandradasan - How did you design KUMMATTY?

Aravindan - I discussed the costume of KUMMATTY with the artist Namboodiri. I knew the actor Ravunni earlier.

Chandradasan - There is a scene in the film,

where KUMMATTY removes his costume beard for a shave?

Aravindan - KUMMATTY's is a dual persona. A real personality and an assumed one. If he is not this he will remain just as an idea. And if he remains as a concept he will not fit into the essence of the story. I wanted to show that apart from his supernatural image he is also real. Through the masks he is bringing, I have related him to the animal forms as well. I introduced the scene of 'shaving' to reveal these characteristics of KUMMATTY. His actual personality is located between myth and reality and yet there is no fantasy in it at all. People sometimes call him a thief. I have also introduced in the film, elements of magic and black art in the beginning before the arrival of KUMMATTY. The doctor in this film is also a magician. According to the doctor's diagnosis, the woman with the fits (to whom he is administering medicine) is possessed. It has to be treated with black art. In fact the children follow the doctor to the house of the sick woman. The idea is that children are growing up in an atmosphere where KUMMATTY will not be an unusual guest.

Chandradasan Is not the pace and rhythm of KUMMATTY slow?

Aravindan - A fast pace will not suit this story. It has to have an organic movement and rhythm of its own.

Chandradasan It is said in the handout of KUMMATTY that this is the story of rebirths?!

Aravindan - Well, there is not anything

like that in the film. The suggestion in the handout was unnecessary. Some such comment has appeared in the handout of KANCHANA SEETA also...

ESTHEPPAN:

Chandradasan - I rate ESTHEPPAN as the best film I have seen.

Aravindan - Many have told me similar things. Personally also, the theme I like most is that of ESTHEPPAN.

Chandradasan - In the film there is one person giving two stories of the same event. At this rate we don't know what is real and what is mythical.

Aravindan - The issue here is which of the stories about Estheppan is right. Perhaps all of them are right, perhaps all are wrong.

Chandradasan - Is there any real character like ESTHEPPAN in Kerala?

Aravindan - Not that I know of. ESTHEPPAN grew out of the many stories I have heard from different religions. A lot of my imagination has also gone into it.

Chandradasan - Why did you then give it a Christian backdrop?

Aravindan - The story is also linked to the beliefs and practices of the fishermen. There is not any particular reason that the film has a Christian backdrop. However the structure of the Church, the seashore and the fisher folks together has given the film a depth and meaning, which may not have been the case with some other backdrop....



Chandradasan - Can you explain the duality of reality and myth in ESTHEPPAN's individuality?

Aravindan - Actually, he was a very ordinary man. You understand ESTHEPPAN only through the stories people relate about him. There are people who tell one story in many different ways. In the film there is one person giving two stories of the same event. At this rate we don't know what is real and what is mythical. The issue here is which of the stories about ESTHEPPAN is right. Perhaps all of them are right, perhaps all are wrong.

Chandradasan Each episode in ESTHEPPAN is a story told about him. How did you bring it together?

Aravindan - The film begins with the shot of Estheppan coming from the sea. This is a story being told by the fishermen making their nets beginning with "Oh what an unusual brightness there is. It is like the sun has risen from the sea itself..." When this story ends another one begins... "It doesn't matter, let us find what exactly happened at the Church" and so one story begins and merges into another. It is not the type of story with a beginning, progression and end. In our tradition this is called 'Shakha Chamkramanam'.

We started with simple statements about Estheppan, going on to simple stories and then progressing to more complex ones. By the time the story grows complex, one 'event' has more than one interpretation. In the story of a boatman there was a person called Estheppan... who now is the guardian and protector of the fisher folk,

whereas, the Esthappan who saves the grandson of the contractor is someone who is living in our midst.

Chandradasan - So Estheppan is someone who lives beyond time and space.

Aravindan Yes, there is a timelessness about him... He is said to have been seen at Ernakulam and Iddukki at the same time. At one moment he disappears into the space. That is the time people make a search for him. Then the priest tells them, "where can he go, he will come back to us" The film ends with the dance drama of the fishermen when the camera makes a 360-degree turn and you see Estheppan sleeping on a nearby rock.

Chandradasan - After becoming a well-loved person for the villagers through his acts of generosity, Esthapan disappears from the village.

Aravindan - Estheppan shares the pain of a prostitute who has been ostracized by her family and society. Telling her "I will share your burden and you share mine" he takes money from his bag (bundle) and gives it to her. Later he extends a similar gesture of help to all the people in the village. With that gesture of goodness, people who disliked him earlier begin to accept him. He finds no meaning in continuing to stay and therefore he disappears.

Chandradasan - Can you explain about the last dance drama? What does it signify?

Aravindan - First of all it is an art form, which is practiced by the Latin Christian fishermen in our region. Secondly it is a

miracle play in which there is one scene where an angel arrives. Everyone who has been telling stories about Estheppan is watching this play. I thought somewhere this play might help in understanding the myth of Estheppan - because the viewers themselves create the myth. Somewhere the play helps to sum up the film.

Chandradasan - Is it not the characters in your film themselves who transform Estheppan into a miracle figure? Is it not true to life for people to create stories, than allow the same story to control them, their lives and beliefs?

Aravindan - There are people who live their lives through the stories and myths they create for themselves. It may be their way of regaining energy and the hope to continue living.

Chandradasan - Even if Estheppan is a concept created by society or a character in a film, he also seems to be somebody searching for something propelled by an internal force... for example when the Vicar of the Parish asks him whether he would like to lead a normal life, Estheppan's answer is 'no' and that he will be content with some incense. What then is Esthapan?

Aravindan - Estheppan is a righteous person. He has teased the contractor who drops stones in the sea; he has drunk a whole bottle of whisky in the landlord's house in one shot. Through these gestures he is trying to say something. In every story he is portrayed as very human - a person who loves people and is sympathetic to their pains - some people blame him. Some ignore him. Yet he is largely talked about

as very compassionate.

Chandradasan - The character Estheppan is also shown as an artist whose paintings center around figures with agony writ large on their faces.

Aravindan - Yes he paints Christian motifs, the figures of Christ, angels etc. In fact the actor (Estheppan) Kakanadan himself is a painter, whose work has contributed to the essence of this film.

Chandradasan - Can you tell us also about the dialogues of Estheppan. The whole film thematically, moves on the plain of Christian thinking and concepts. However, the conversations of Estheppan are lyrical, stylised in a rhythm, which reminds one of the 'folk form' of Kerala. Normally such Christian themes and 'folk' dialogues do not blend. How did you bring about this creative merger?

Aravindan - The dialogue was written by Kavalam Narayana Paniker in a folk rhythm and style. A lot of biblical images are used in it; that is why it blends with the personality of Estheppan. While the rhythm helps to underline the personality of Esthapan, the biblical words and images create and maintain a Christian atmosphere.

Chandradasan - What about the music in it?

Aravindan - The music in this film is mainly the sound of the waves and the Gregorian chanting from the church. The Gregorian music is part of the Latin Christians prayer services.

POKKUVEYIL



Chandradasan - POKKUYEYIL is said to be your most slow paced film.

Aravindan - That is right. Some shots in POKKUYEYIL are too long. What happened is that I first recorded the music and then edited the scenes accordingly. But as I was editing, I had to encounter some unforeseen practical problems, mainly recording the length of the film roll. That is why some shots remained lengthier and I could not avoid it. I wanted POKKUYEYIL to be a visual expression and manifestation of music, its many moods and variations, with an end in the past. The story was that of a sensitive young man slowly breaking up mentally. I tried to cut the film according to the notes of the music and tried to give it a structure.

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Chandradasan - While there is a clear plot related to a young poet's psychic pre-occupations, why did you think of relating this to music and working out a structure according to that?

Aravindan - The film progresses in the musical structure of 1,2,3,4. 1,2,3,4...First, you see the house, then the homely Nisha, the sportsman, Joseph, who is a revolutionary and then again the house, the girl... the repetition of shots in that order. As the girl takes leave, this structure changes. The pace becomes faster. I thought this might

help to bring out the life and movements of the protagonist Balu better.

Chandradasan - The film begins and ends in the hospital where Balu is finally seen lying down in a fetus like position.

Aravindan -Yes that is right. The film ends on positive note with the protagonist lying down like a child in the womb. This cyclic structure of the film has been carefully and deliberately evolved.

Chandradasan You establish the psyche of Balu in his encounter with four other individuals.

Aravindan - Balu's world evolved basically from his relationships with four individuals! His father who is an idealist and a politician, his girl friend, the sportsman and the revolutionary. All of them mean a lot to him. His relationship with the family breaks with the death of his father; His girlfriend leaves him; the accident of the sportsman shakes him up deeply; and finally the revolutionary also says good-bye to him. His world crumbles and he becomes a mental wreck.

Chandradasan - Balu wanted to go with Joseph as a political activist.

Aravindan - Balu does express his desire to get involved. However it is Joseph who has doubts about his ability to withstand the pressure of political involvement. Joseph promises to let him know as to when he can join him. Though Balu does not go along he feels just as intensely... It is just that he is not an extrovert, who could not jump in.

Chandradasan - What was the kind of relationship he had with the girl?

Aravindan - It was a common interest in music that brought them together and not an intense emotional relationship based on love. The girl goes away to Bangalore with her father. She being the last link in his small world, he reacts to her departure very strongly and pleads with her not to go. For the first time he holds her hands and literally begs her... do not go... Later he pulls out the tape from the cassette she had presented to him. In fact from here the structure of the film changes completely. The continuity in music ends there and is used again only towards the end of the film. But here again it is a different tune - i.e. the early morning raga - Bhairavi. The music used earlier was a jugalbhandhi - the flute of Hariprasad Chourasia and the sarod of Dr. Rajiv Taranath.

Chandradasan - There are some dream sequences of Balu in the film like the burning backwaters etc., which lend the film a more surrealistic air than symbolist one.

Aravindan - I do not use symbols in any of my films. I feel that symbols are not a good technique, either for cinema or for any other art form. The dreams Balu sees can be seen by anyone in Balu's state of mind. I worked out the progression of dreams only after consulting with a psychiatrist (Dr. Ramesh). A few are dreams I have seen myself, and the rest are that of my friends. I attempted to relate these to the subconscious process of the protagonist.

Chandradasan - You shot the whole film in the twilight?

Aravindan - The whole event is imagined to be taking place at dusk against the setting sun. The lighting pattern is that which does not cast a shadow. It is the twilight mood.

Chandradasan - What do you think about this film now?

Aravindan - I want to see this film once again. There seems to be a sustained interest in this film abroad and off and on I do get both critical and appreciative letters from people abroad. I have also received paintings in response!

CHIDAMBARAM

Chandradasan - The two films CHIDAMBARAM and ORIDATHU are commercial successes too. Is it due to the changing tastes of the audience or is it because your own films have changed?

Aravindan - Compared to my other films the above two had a sustained story line, especially CHIDAMBARAM. Then there were well-known cine artistes appearing in these films. These may be some of the reasons for their popularity.

Chandradasan - You are one of those who firmly believe that cinema is a director's medium and hence have denied the role of popular actors. Also you are one of those directors who is articulate about the aesthetics of 'New Cinema' as opposed to commercial cinema. In CHIDAMBARAM for the first time you have introduced popular actors and actresses as also a linear narrative structure. What could be the reasons for this change?

Aravindan - I liked this story written by C



V Sriraman. There were a few specific reasons for making it into a film at that point of time. After spending three years without a producer, I decided to produce this film on my own, which meant that I had to cut down expenses to the minimum. CHIDAMBARAM has only three characters. The village, Mattapatty provided a good backdrop for the film. There were also many friends to help me. Smita Patil had expressed her desire to act in one of my films much before this. Gopi was also willing to come. When they learned that it is my own production, many artists came forward to help. No one acted in the film expecting any financial returns from me. They did it for me. The story is intense and provided roles for good performances. All these are the reasons for CHIDAMBARAM.

Chandradasan - Well, when you employ busy actors, would there not be a problem of their familiar mannerisms, style of acting, expectations of the audience etc.?

Aravindan - Yes, but it is different for actors like Gopi or actresses like Smita Patil. The expectations are different. They don't fall into the category of 'popular' as it is understood in the context of popular cinema.

Chandradasan -When the film started it seemed refreshingly different. However after a while one began to notice the intrusion aspects of commercial cinema - for instance building up a climax and then breaking it - the audience is almost led to participate that something is going to happen between Shivakami and the superintendent. But we see suddenly that the relationship is actually between Shankaran and Shivakami.

Aravindan - (Silent for a moment). The film can be divided into two parts. One is the wedding of Muniyanti and Shivakami, the intimacy between Shivakami and Shankaran, the suicide of Muniyanti and the disappearance of Shankaran. The second part is Shankaran's response to the events. Shankaran is a very ordinary man - almost a simpleton. But he is very compassionate towards the lower castes - and mixes well with them. Shankaran's affinity to Shivakami at best is an infatuation. May be that is why he was unprepared and unable to face up to the eventualities. As he runs away he has some unusual experiences like getting frightened by the milk boy, the psychiatrist advising to him to read the Bhagavad Geetha, the liquor shop owner advising the people not to drink etc. There are some flaws in this film.

Chandradasan - What are the differences between the original story and your film?

Aravindan - The main change is in the location, which shifted from Eerchamill location to the cattle farm location. Then, the protagonist of the story attempts to murder his senior officer after becoming aware of his relationship with his wife. In the film, Muniyanti kills his wife and commits suicide.

Chandradasan - Didn't these changes invite criticism?

Aravindan - Yes, but the changes were introduced to make the story more visual and cinematic. It was not meant to be a socio-political film.

Chandradasan - CHIDAMBARAM has re-

ceived good critical acclaim in India. Many have written positively about the film, like Iqbal Masud, Ravindran etc. What is your assessment of this film?

Aravindan - CHIDAMBARAM is not really one of my best films. It makes me wonder why many people like it! I don't think the film is that great...
ORIDATHU:

Chandradasan The theme of this film is the electrification of a village and the changes this introduces in the village. Is it in any way a statement on modernity or mechanisation?

Aravindan - What the film underlines is the necessity for basic ethical premises, whatever one is engaged in. The film strictly is not on the effects of modernity or modern technology. This is just incidental - the theme could be anything. In this instance the overseer is a man without any scruples - and that is the central point.

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Chandradasan -The film seems to be more allegorical. Many people work towards the electrification of the village apart from the overseers. So how is it that the ethical issue becomes only that of the overseer?

Aravindan - Everything in the village happens according to the scheming of the overseer who manipulates for his personal interests.

Chandradasan - This film is very humorous compared to your other films.

Aravindan - There is an element of caricature in all the characters. A little exaggeration and lot of humor was consciously introduced to make effective the last sequence, which is the explosion. In fact the whole film moves towards the climax - the clash on the day of the festival and the breaking out of the fire.

Chandradasan - The film begins and ends with a festival.

Aravindan - The film begins with a festival in the temple (this happens before work begins for the electrification) The festival does not come up to the expectation of the villagers. According to the belief in the village, if the temple festival does not do well, the Poorum festival will be a great success. The film ends with the celebration of Poorum.

Chandradasan - This is a film where you have used the maximum number of shots.

Aravindan - ORIDATHU is complex in that it has many characters and many incidents and therefore does not have a single motif - the usual type of music is also absent. I worked with a cinematic form, which could engage the audience, for which I had to use more shots taken from different angles. This is also a film where I have used the sounds of the incidents to the maximum.

Chandradasan - Why did you use a Trivandrum accent for the overseer, Sundaresan (Nedumudi Venu)? Was there not sufficient



comedy in the film without this element?

Aravindan - I have used different dialects used in Malayalam, for example the villagers speak pure Valluvanadan Malayalam of South Malabar, and the fake Doctor uses Travancore Malayalam etc.

Chandradasan - The setting of this story is between 1952-55. Is not the portrayal of the communist in the film a little out of place and also a little unbelievable?

Aravindan - A bit of caricaturing is done of this character also. Yet someone like him lived in my village too. Someone who believed that everything that happened and is happening in Russia is great-like the bridges they build, their hydro-electrical projects etc - and worthy of being emulated. Many have reacted violently to this portrayal. It is really sad that when the Russians themselves are re-evaluating their politics and practices we react badly even to a joke! I have sought to portray this character positively as someone who is concerned about society.

Chandradasan -How was this film received outside Kerala and abroad?

Aravindan -On the whole the response was good. The film has gone for the maximum number of film festivals and everywhere has received a positive response.

Chandradasan - We can relate this film to the electricity problem we are facing in the country. A nuclear power plant is going to be established in Koodamkulam near Nagar Koil. Some say it is good and some consider it is bad. What do you think of it?

Aravindan - My opinion is that nuclear power is dangerous. However it is not only nuclear power plants, but the entire trend in science and technology which is negative. The question is how you perceive development. What is 'development'? The problem is of how you handle the process of development. Though concepts like "small is beautiful" etc. have existed, people are more conscious about it these days. Countries like Japan are also trying to contain 'progress' and people are giving more time to leisure. The business establishments spend a lot of money for creative works like theatre, paintings etc.

Chandradasan - ORIDATHU is discussing a serious issue, but I have a feeling the treatment of it is very simplistic....

Aravindan -I will not debate that.

Chandradasan - Recently a lot of offbeat films were received well in Kerala - ORIDATHU, ANANTHARAM of Adoor Gopalakrishnan etc. What do you think of it?

Aravindan -This is a very local trend, which perhaps is also there in Bengal, where a number of filmmakers and film societies make films and have discussions on new cinema.

MARATTAM

Chandradasan - Do tell us about your film MARATTAM which is under production.

Aravindan - This film is also based on the story written by Kavalam Narayana Paniker. The story is of the love (which is more an erotic attachment) which a woman feels towards the Kathakali character in Keecha-

ka Vadham(the killing of Keechaka). The story of the film is different from the original. In the film after Keechaka is killed, a policeman comes to enquire about it. You can say that the film narrative is centered on the earnest enquiry of this policeman into the murder. The film can be divided into three parts. Each part is a version about the murder of Keechaka.

The first version of it is told by Koipattiri who plays the role of Valalen in Kathakali. In the play he does kill Keechaka who was a bad man. But he has not killed Kelu, who acted as Keechaka; He cannot even conceive of doing so since Kelu is his friend and a good man. The first part acts out how Koipattiri kills Keechaka.

In the film after Keechaka is killed, a policeman comes to enquire about it. You can say that the film narrative is centered on the earnest enquiry of this policeman into the murder. The film can be divided into three parts. Each part is a version about the murder of Keechaka. All the three episodes are rendered differently. The first song is rendered in the folk tune and rhythm of Thampuran Pattu of Southern Kerala. The second version is set to the tune of Pulluvan Pattu, and the third in the style of Ayappan Pattu.

Chandradasan - So what is the relationship of Koipattiri to Keechaka's murder?

Aravindan - We have not made that clear. It is kept as a mystery. The second part is the story told by the wife of Koipattiri. She tells the police that she has committed the murder. But she has killed Kelu. She cannot think of killing Keechaka who for

her symbolizes the ultimate male whereas Kelu is an ugly and indecent person. She kills him when he makes advances to her. This is acted out in the second part. The third part of the story is told by the Chorus. They killed the artist in Kelu because Kochashan (tutor) from the 'Kalari' (school) tells them to do so. All the three episodes are rendered differently. The first song is rendered in the folk tune and rhythm of Thampuran Pattu of Southern Kerala. The second version is set to the tune of Pulluvan Pattu, and the third in the style of Ayappan Pattu. All the songs are written by Kavalam Narayana Paniker.

Chandradasan - In this film Kelu appears as 'Kelu' as well as in the role of Keechaka. Both roles are rendered in a similar fashion. Why is that?

Aravindan - There is not anything realistic in the film. There are no dialogues either. There is only narrative poetry.

Chandradasan - How have you concluded this film?

Aravindan - As the policeman goes back you hear the drums of Kathakali. A wayfarer tells the police that "today there is Kathakali at the 'Kolathu' (the temple theatre). The story is Keechakavadham and Kelu is playing the role of Keechaka".

Chandradasan - So is the film a fantasy play?

Aravindan - It could be seen as such but we have not treated the visuals like that.

Chandradasan - The film sounds like Kuro-



sava's RASHAMON which also portrays multiple versions of a death.

Aravindan - This film has an overt resemblance to RASHAMON but beyond that there is nothing common. The form, the structural pattern, the narrative and the stylization etc. are very different.

Chandradasan - How have you edited this film?

Aravindan - I have kept a continuous movement while fusing the three episodes. Most of the shots used in the film are either crane shots or trolley shots. There is no still shot other than that of the policeman who is in a way, external to the story. He asks the same questions as any policeman normally asks for his First Information Report.

Chandradasan - You have shot MARATTAM for National TV. Has there been any restrictions imposed on you because of that?

Aravindan - There is nothing like that...

Chandradasan - This film is based on Kathakali. So why did you use folk forms in music instead of original Kathakali tunes?

Aravindan - Kathakali has its own rigidity. It is not possible to make a film confining oneself to its form.

Chandradasan - You told that MARATTAM you employed colors consciously?

Aravindan - I have not selected the colors with any special emphasis or meaning. Yellow, maroon, white, red, black etc. are

familiar colors used frequently in Kathakali, costumes, rituals, mural paintings and rangoli etc.

Chandradasan - Who are all the actors in it?

Aravindan - The actors are from Kathakali and theatre. Sadanandan Krishnamurthy who acted as Keechaka is a Kathakali actor. Kalamandalam Kesavan is Koipattiri. Kavuti is the dance artiste Urmila and so on...

Chandradasan - You have made this film for Television. Do you think it will be fully understood and appreciated by the people outside Kerala?

Aravindan - The film is subtitled in an easy style. There is also not much usage of Kathakali symbols, except in the beginning. I hope the film will be understood and appreciated.

PART III

Chandradasan - Your documentary film SAHAJA has created some controversy recently. What has happened actually?

Aravindan - SAHAJA was the last bit of a program designed by Chandralekha for exhibition in Russia. Her exhibition portrayed the Indian women, their activities and their cultural context. It is a half an hour documentary based on our Ardhanariswara concept. The attempt was to portray the inherent feminine principle in the masculine. For this we had included Odissi of Keluchandra Mahapatra and 'Bhamakalapam' performed by Vedantam Satyanarayana Sastri. How far the documentary was successful in bringing the Ardhanariswara concept out, I do not know.

However, it could have gone as part of the exhibition. SAHAJA is part of the New Delhi film festival - Indian Panorama.

Chandradasan - But why did this film become so controversial?

Aravindan - I don't know... It was part of the project accepted by the Human Resource Ministry. The project had also mentioned that this film was based on the Ardhanariswara principle. Why was it excluded at the last moment... Perhaps they wanted to show a film on Indira Gandhi?! I do not see any particular reason for it... In Chandralekha's project, Indira Gandhi was portrayed as one of the outstanding women of India along with Sarojini Naidu and Balasaraswathi. In place of SAHAJA they screened a film on Indira Gandhi (laughs) looks like that is what they wanted.

Chandradasan - What is your opinion of film censorship?

Aravindan - I think films should not be censored. It is really bad to cut a piece out of a serious work of art. Such things will affect the whole structure. However since we cannot afford it now, it is wise to perhaps work accordingly, I do take some precautions and have not faced any censor problems.

Chandradasan - You don't agree with the censoring of vulgar elements in commercial cinema?

Aravindan - Is there not a lot of vulgarity in spite of it? Those who have a lot of money and influence do break rules. In reality, the censorship will affect only the serious

filmmakers and not those who indulge in vulgarity. Censorship will not give the filmmaker enough room for creative experiments endeavors.

Chandradasan - What do you think of the governmental subsidies and financial assistance to filmmakers? What do you think of the role played by institutions like NFDC?

Aravindan - First it was only the Bengal State Government, which produced films. This was given up since it was a failure. NFDC is doing as much as it can in this regard.

Chandradasan - One hears a lot of complaints about the India International Film Festivals!

Aravindan - Other than in socialist countries, only in India the Government is conducting film festivals. Elsewhere it is either by individuals or institutions. I think the festival suffers the limitations of every other governmental enterprise. The government has to take care of its diplomatic relations and other interests, then there is the bureaucracy... the problems of finance etc.... The Directorate of Film Festivals is only a small department under the Information and Broadcasting Ministry...

Chandradasan - Are we conducting the festivals with an emphasis on aesthetic sensibility?

Aravindan - No. The angle is that of 'Developmental Activity'. The finance department considers the money spent on it as a loss. It should not be viewed like that. The government has to spend money on many



things without measuring the returns in terms of financial profitability. The film festivals went back to the government because NFDC could not bear the losses. When NFDC was conducting the festivals it was a little more open and flexible, I suppose...

Chandradasan - Recently I had gone through the entire list of films in the Indian Panorama, one could notice some interesting developments. When the Panorama began only the 'new wave' or 'parallel' cinema was represented. From 1980 onwards we see the inclusion of commercial films as well. Now this year, in Malayalam, only commercial films are included in the Panorama. In the beginning it looked like Panorama was only for the 'off beat' films. Now is it the turn of commercial cinema?

Aravindan - Well... it is something like that now. It could be because a premier show on Doordarshan will fetch rupees eight lakhs. People will try to influence decisions. The main problem is that of the selection committee, which represents varied interests. The cancellation of the provision of a review of rejected films at the regional level has made things worse, since the regional panel has now become the sole authority to decide which film will get into the Panorama. Perhaps this year's selection is a good example of what can really happen... to mention one or two films which should have been in the Panorama are Satyan's SAMVATSARANGAL and Ravindran's ORE THUVAL PAKSHIKAL. Why they are not included in the Panorama?! Opportunities for exposure is lost for these films and filmmakers. We don't have to hunt for reasons for the dwindling credi-

bility of the Indian panorama as well as for the empty auditoriums while Panorama films are exhibited these days.

Chandradasan - You have been attending festivals abroad. What is the state of the world cinema and what are its standards?

Aravindan - Other than Tarkovsky's SACRIFICE, there have not been any films which can be termed 'outstanding' for quite a few years now. I have not seen LAST TEMPTATION by Scorsese. Everyone who has seen the film has told me that it is a superb work. Our government has decided not to show that film here.

Chandradasan - Whose works do you like the most?

Aravindan - I like all the films of Tarkovsky. I also like many films of various directors. But if you want to call someone a Master Director, it is Tarkovsky.

Chandradasan - What about the Indian Directors?

Aravindan - I like Mani Kaul's films.

Chandradasan - John Abraham?

Aravindan - AGRAHARATHIL KAZHUTHAI is a good film. In the other films we can perceive the genius in John. But the productions are erratic. They don't have the discipline and organization a film requires. This could be because of the special nature of his lifestyle.

Chandradasan - Based on the Ramayana, you directed KANCHANA SEETHA. What do

you think of the Ramayana of Ramanand Sagar as also the Mahabharata now being serialized?

Aravindan - I have seen only few episodes; my opinion is limited to that. I am afraid, it might badly affect the imagination of our children and their sensibilities as also our own!

Chandradasan - We have not discussed your documentaries. Can you tell about the documentaries you consider important?

Aravindan - I have done a lot of documentaries by now. But there are only three or four worth mentioning. One is on V T Bhattathiripad, the other biography of J Krishnamurthy, "Seer Who Walks Alone"; and 'Sahaja'. There are also one or two incomplete documentaries - an hour-long film on the folk dances of Kerala, and a film on E M S Namboodiripad. At the moment I am planning a one and half hour film on V K Krishna Menon.

Chandradasan - I have read that you were very deeply moved by the scene in the film where Shri Krishnamurthy is shown crossing the bridge over Ganga?

Aravindan - I had not met Shri Krishnamurthy earlier. Although I had read his works and about him, I had not understood them completely. Meeting him has made a difference, although we have not talked at length or even discussed his philosophy. He is a very honest man. According to him, our lives in the modern context cannot be explained in terms of any particular philosophy like Buddhism or any other. It is beyond them.

The scene you are talking about is the last shot in the film. Krishnamurthy was walking across one of the tributaries of Ganga, the 'Pancha Ghosh' Marg to Saranath. Shaji and I were waiting to shoot this without his knowledge. During summer although one can walk across the river, there always is a boatman waiting on the banks. What I saw is that as soon as Krishnamurthy saw the boatman he put his hand around his shoulder like good old friends, started talking and laughing with him. What touched me deeply was this simplicity. The last scene is not acted out for the film. I don't think he knew we were shooting.

Chandradasan - Do you have any film, which is half done or abandoned in your career?

Aravindan - No. I do have some preliminary ideas for one or two films - one is about the migration from Travancore to Malabar. It would involve about four generations, moving from the love of the soil and land to the attractions of the city.

Chandradasan - What is your approach to your own personal life?

Aravindan - My personal life is a free flowing one. Not very disciplined.

Chandradasan - Do you think your films receive adequate exposure and are well appreciated?

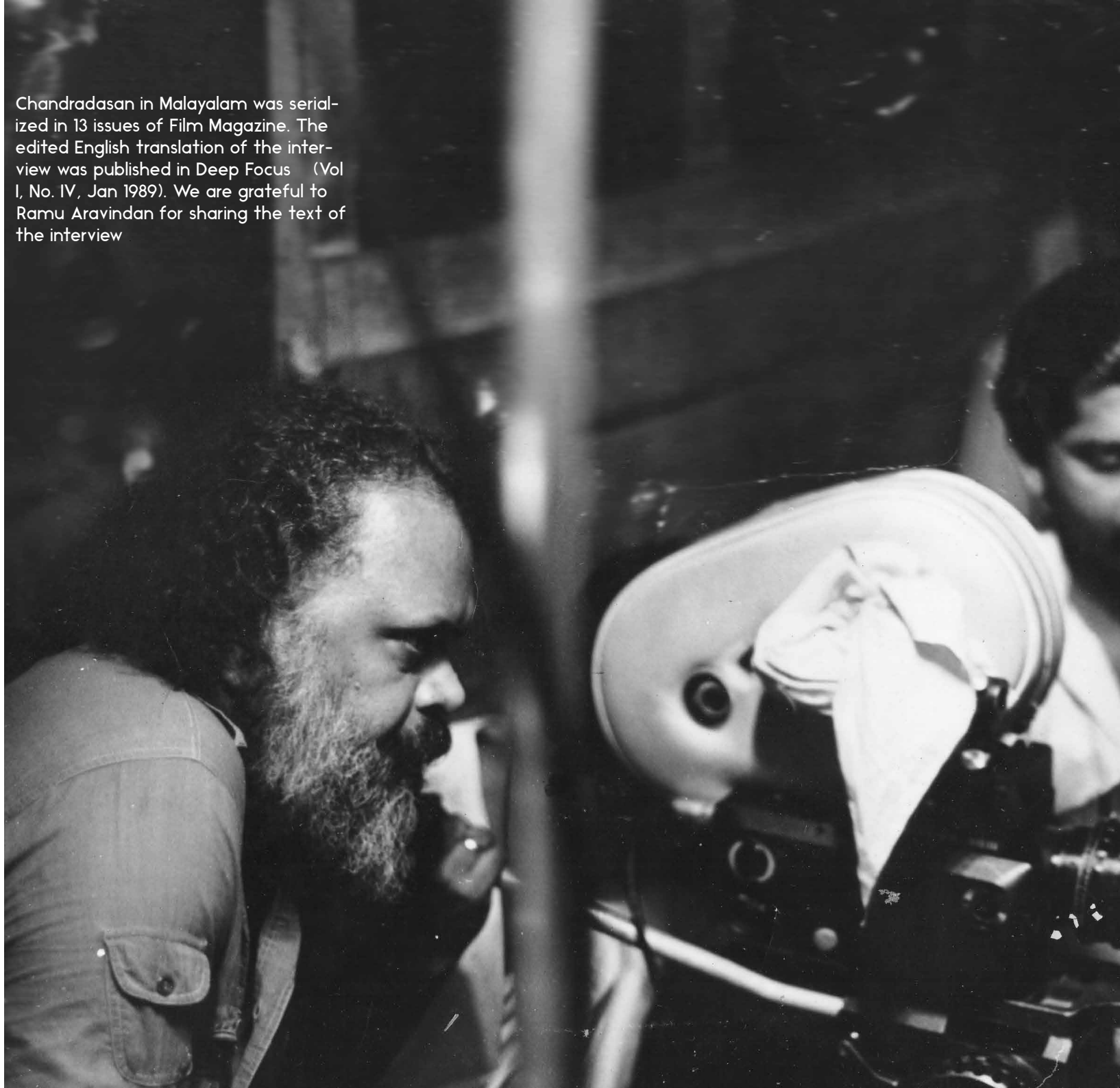
Aravindan - I don't know - I don't think so. There are problems regarding distribution and exhibition. I have not been successful in propagating my films or explaining them.

Chandradasan - I have heard that you are a person of few words. When I told my friends about this interview, they were surprised and are waiting in anticipation.

Aravindan - Normally I don't mingle with many people. I talk only little, even with the close friends I have. Also I don't encourage interviews since it is difficult to explain and answer all the questions. Again what comes out in print may not be the same as that which was discussed. Then one has to clarify etc. Well, I think that this is the first time I am talking at this length and depth about my films!

Translated from Malayalam
by George Kutty A L

Chandradasan in Malayalam was serialized in 13 issues of Film Magazine. The edited English translation of the interview was published in Deep Focus (Vol I, No. IV, Jan 1989). We are grateful to Ramu Aravindan for sharing the text of the interview



Young filmmakers

The student shorts section at IFFB is a collection of the most promising student films made across the country with significant cinematic moments created across genres. The films are reflective of the future of Indian cinema, and shows the direction that Indian cinema will be heading towards in the years to come.



Kamuki

(Sweetheart) 24 mins | Malayalam

2015

Divya, a 17 year old school girl realizes that she is pregnant from her estranged boyfriend. Disregarding her family and school obligations she sets out to find and claim him back to her life.



Christo Tomy graduated in Direction and Screenplay Writing from Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata. His first feature film script 'The Funeral' was part of the NFDC Screenwriter's Lab and the Film Bazaar, 2017.

print source: christotomy@gmail.com

Story, Direction Christo Tomy **Cinematography** Dhanesh Raveendranath
Editing – Gautham Nerusu **Sound-** Anuroop Kukreja **Art Direction** Sou-
meen Bhowmick **Screenplay** – Sreeraj Rajiv S, Christo Tomy
Producer Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute **Cast:** Krishna Padmakumar, Mithun Nalini, Moham Krishnan, Thankam Mohan, Kunjila



Rajat Kamal, Best Debut Film
National Film Awards
Signs Film Awards



Truth Embedded

10 mins | English

2017

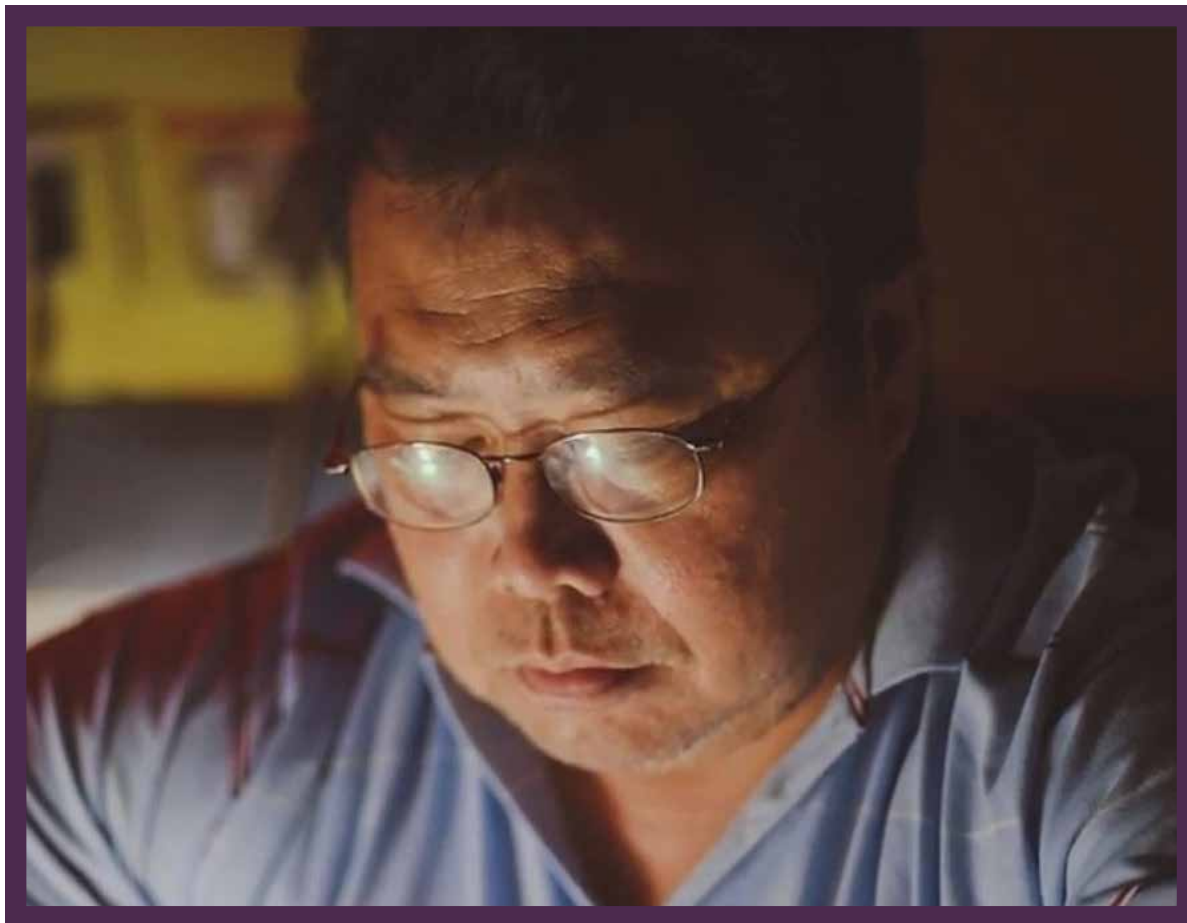
Truth embedded is an artistic expression of the emotions involved in the journey of life. The emotions that take us from one stage to another ultimately leading to MOKSHA. theatre, dance, painting and music. Every single one of it communicating the most common emotions that all of us encounter, depicting life from happiness to moksha.



Anusuya's spiritual quest helped her understand the concept of 'Salvation' or 'Moksha'. Although tough to reach that stage, understanding it is a first step towards attaining that goal. This journey is the key element of my short film "Truth Embedded". The film shows the perspectives of two people with art as the connecting thread.

Producer & Director: Anusuya Vasudevan **Writer:** Conceptualised: Anusuya Vasudevan, Haiku and Tanka by Ms. Kala Ramesh **Cast:** Vaishali Chakravarthy, Purushu Arie

print source: saisadwaita@gmail.co



Al-Kabirah

(The Great) 29 mins | Hindi, Urdu, Odia
2017

Set in a small town of Eastern India, 'Al Kabirah' deals with the politics of space and language, it does so from the perspective of an ethically conflicted criminal, over the course of 24 hours in his life.



Abhishek Parija is an Indian filmmaker from Odisha. He recently completed his graduation in English Literature from Ravenshaw University, Cuttack. While he was still an undergraduate, he set out to make his first independent short film, 'Al Kabirah'.

print source: abhishek.parija10@gmail.com

Producer: Prayas Mohanty and Abhishek Parija **Director:** Abhishek Parija
Editor: Deepak Kumar Padhi, Manas Ranjan Sahoo, Abhishek Parija **Cast:**
Vishal Nayak, Dipanwit Dashmohapatra, Sakar Khanu



Afternoon Clouds

12 mins | Hindi

2016

Kaki is a 60 year old widow who lives with her Nepali maid Malti. The film takes place on one afternoon in their house where a flower blossoms in the balcony. Malti meets a boy from her hometown unexpectedly. In the meanwhile, men in the passage spray mosquito repellent smoke that gives Kaki bad dreams.



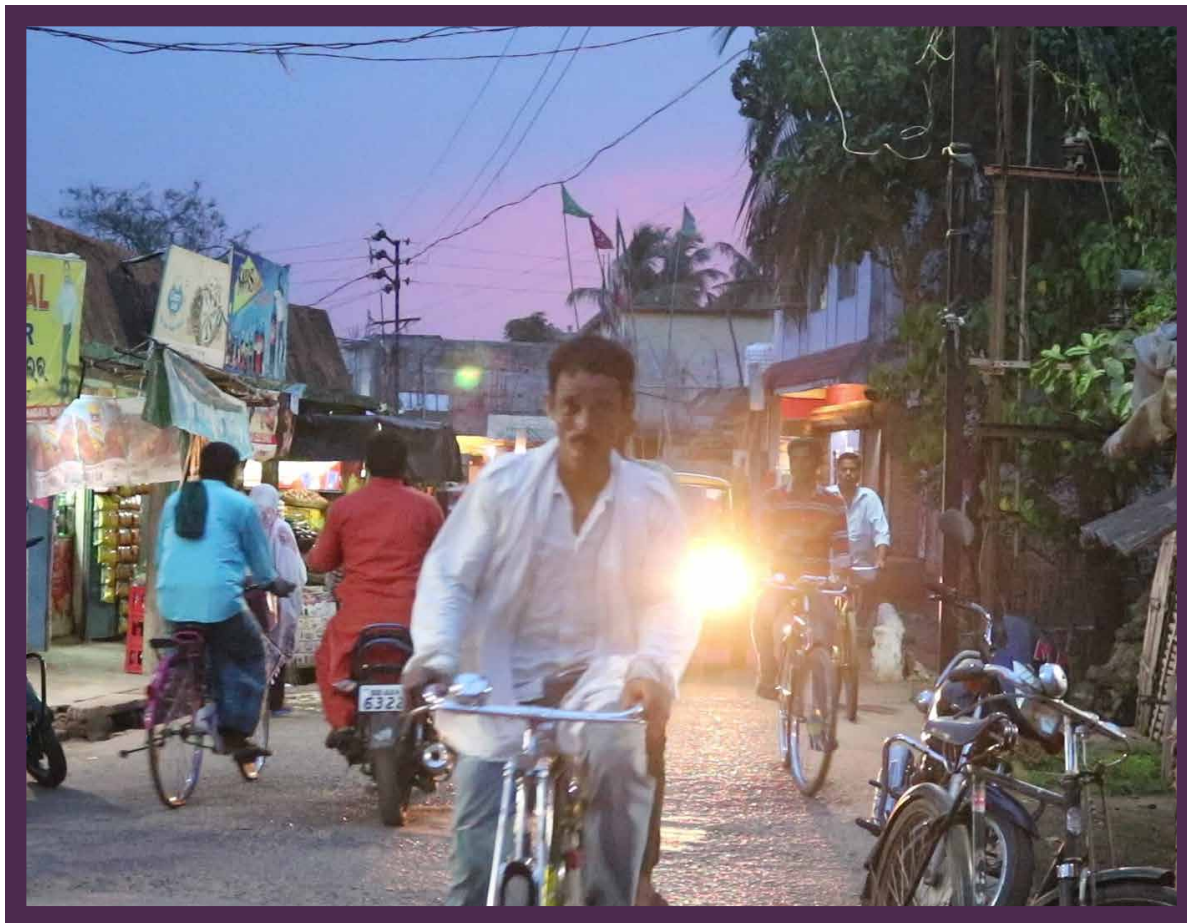
Payal Kapadia is a filmmaker from Bombay, India. Her film *The Last Mango Before the Monsoon* was shown at The International Short Film festival of Oberhausen (2015) where it won the FIPRESCI Award and Special Jury Mention and the Best Film at the Mumbai International Film Festival (2016). She is currently studying film direction at the Film and Television Institute of India.

print source: ftiifro@gmail.com

Director Payal Kapadia **Editor** Ghanashyam Shimpi **Cinematographer** Mayank Khurana **Cast** Usha Naik, Trimala Adhikari



Festival Internacional De Cine Filmadrid, Spain
Film Festival De Cannes 2017
Clapstick International Students Film Festival



Achinha Saba

(An Unidentified Carcass) 56 mins

Odia | 2017

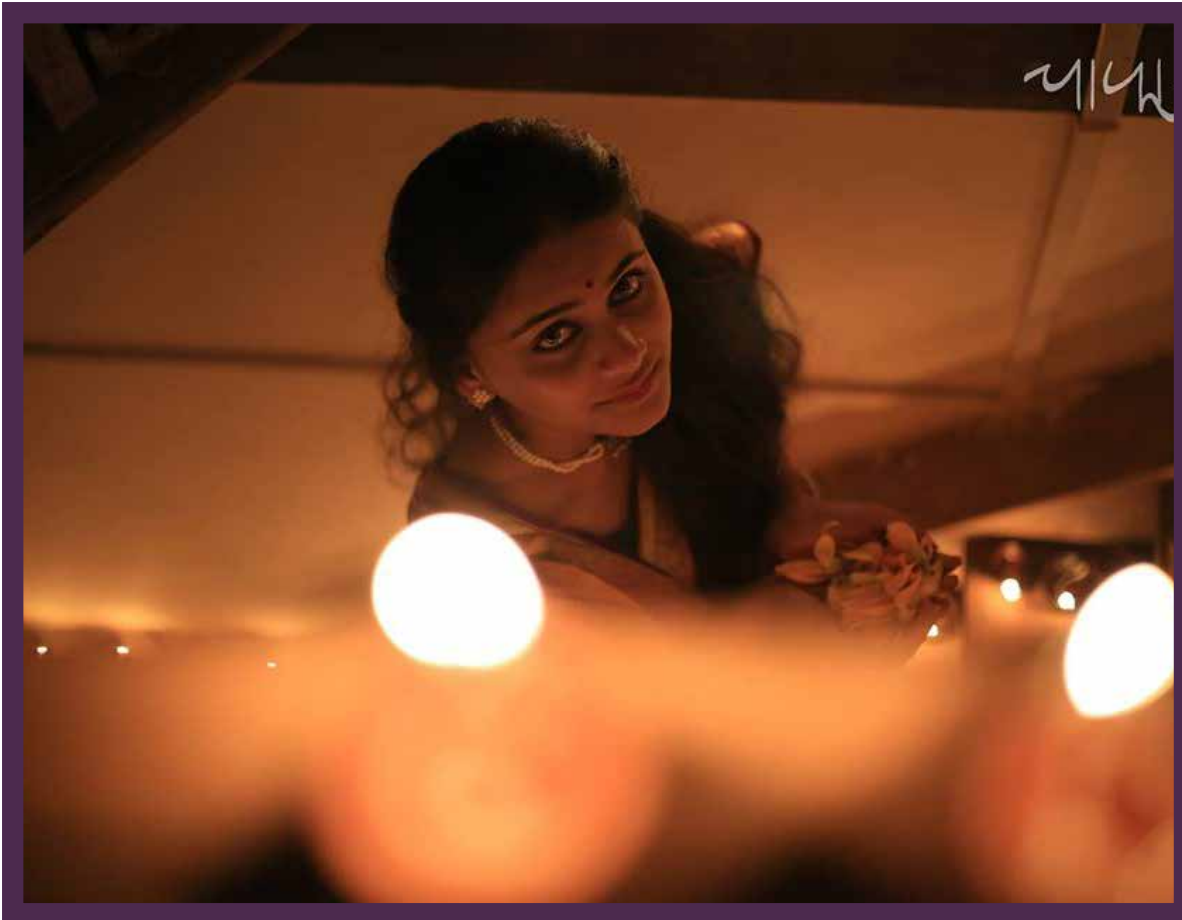
Followed by the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami, a college student starts posting derogatory comments on Facebook about Hindu God Ram and Sita. It is followed by rioting the town by some right wing Hindu groups by destroying of public property followed by a reaction by the Muslim community of Bhadrak. The film tried to understand the architecture of the vote bank politics of Bhadrak. It opens up the mechanics to understand the current political situation of the country.



Sankalp is a final year student of Mass Communication at Xavier University, Bhubaneswar. Achinha Saba is his debut feature documentary.

Producer(s) Samadrusti, ASA Entertainment **Sound, Editing, Direction** Sankalp Mohanty **Camera** Aditya John Paul Tirkey **Asst. Camera** Abhijeet Paul Dhan, Adarshdeep Singh **Original Score** Kevin McLeod

print source: sankalp.r8@gmail.com



Chafa

19 mins | silent

2017

Reality and routine has its own pace and novelty. The place we live in plays a vital role in our lives, not only because we can be found, but surroundings do shape our behaviour and responses. There are moments where the line between reality and illusion gets blurred and we are lured by an illusion which on the exterior always looks more interesting than the routine. In that moment we try to change ourselves as per the illusion demands. But what really changes? We? Our responses? The situation? Chafa delves into these blurred lines where we try to figure out what's better for us, the reality or illusion.



Manasi Deodhar is 20 year old girl who resides in a small village called Akeri, Sindhudurga, Maharashtra. She plans to learn film making. This is her debut short film.

print source: manasi6343@gmail.com

Producer Manasi Deodhar **Story Screenplay and Direction** Manasi Deodhar
Cinematography and Editing Rahul Zende **Art direction and Costume** Manasi Deodhar
Sound Design Piyush Shah **Music** Sarang Kulkarni **DI** Pradyumna Sawant
Cast Makarand Mungekar, Swardali Salaskar



Montreal Film Festival



Verge

5 mins | silent

2017

The film is set against the backdrop of a post-apocalyptic world. There are no other humans or animals appearing in the film and minimal amount of life is left on Earth. Mark is driving his rusty old Japanese model Maruti 800 in search of someone, or something. As he is driving, he keeps on looking at the photo in his hands as if he's constantly reassuring himself that he'll find what he's looking for. He looks very disturbed and agitated; he might be looking for a loved one or a family member perhaps.



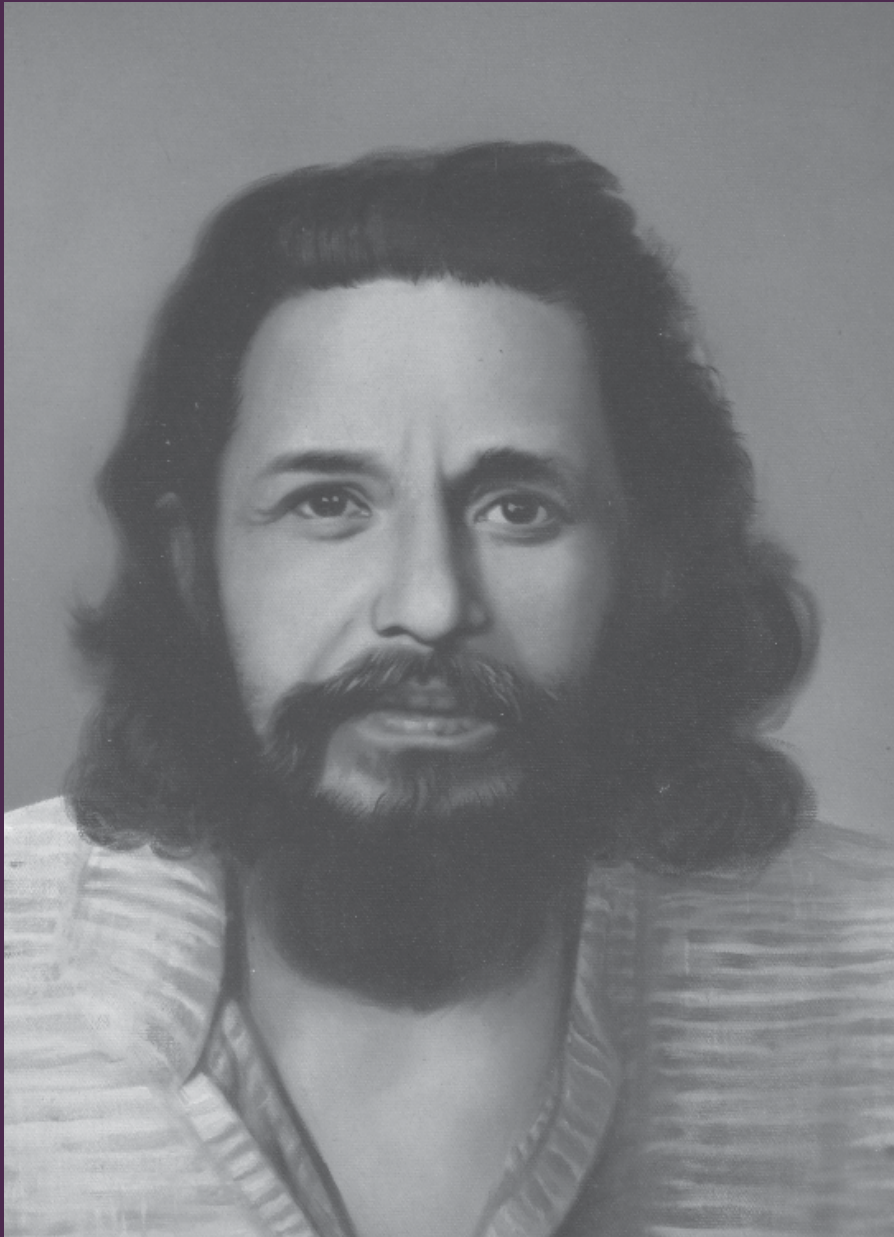
Verge is a debut film by Antony Samson and Anil Babu

print source: abbrorevel@gmail.com

Producer Samson Davis & Babu Verghee **Direction** Antony Samson & Anil Babu **Cinematography** Neeraj Ravi **Editor** Rathin Radakrishnan **Sound Design** Harry Correya **Music** Yakzan Gary Periera & Neha Nair **Mix and mastering** Yakzan Gary Periera



Signature Film Festival



John Abraham

11 August 1937 - 31 May 1987

"I am not a Phenomenon"

1967: Konya Nagar (Documentary)

1969: Priya (Short Film); Hides and Strings (Documentary)

1971: Vidyarthikale Ithile Ithile (This Way Students)

1977: Agraharathil Kazhuthai (Donkey in a Brahmin Village)

1979: Cheriya-chente Kroora Krithyangal (The Evil Deeds of Cheriyan)

1986: Amma Ariyan (Report to Mother)

John Abraham was born in Kuttanad, Central Kerala. He studied filmmaking at the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. At the film institute he was a student of Ritwik Ghatak, the great Bengali filmmaker. Ghatak left a significant influence on the way John approached cinema and many consider the student to be a true follower of the teacher.

After his studies, John assisted Mani Kaul on Uski Roti before moving to Madras (Chennai) and making his first feature film Vidyarthikale Ithile Ithile (This Way Students/1971). His second film Agraharathil Kazhuthai (Donkey in a Brahmin Village/1977) was made in Tamil. His third film Cheriya-chente Kroora Krithyangal (The Evil Deeds of Cheriyan/1979) was made in Malayalam in the backdrops of Kuttanad, John's home place. John passionately believed that cinema could be used as an effective tool for social change. He constituted the Odessa Collective, aiming at production and exhibition of good cinema with active participation of the general public, without the intervention of market forces. Odessa's first film and John's last Amma Ariyan re-wrote all the conventions of filmmaking. They raised money for the film by travelling from village to village, beating drums and asking for contributions for the 'people's cinema'. He also took active part in street theatre movement. He passed away in a tragic accident in May 1987.

John had attained mythical proportions even during his short life span, living a nomadic existence, rebelling against the established ways.



Cheriyachente Kroora Krithyangal

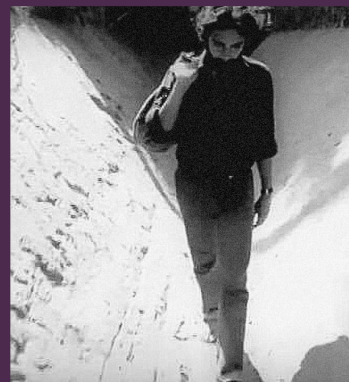
(The Wicked Deeds of Cheriyachan) 107 mins
Malayalam | 1979

Director John Abraham **Producer** Janasakthi Films **Story, Script and Dialogue** John Abraham **Cinematography** Madhu Ambat **Music** Johnson **Cast** Adoor Bhasi, Kaviyoor Ponnammamma, Poornima Jayaram, Abraham Joseph, Venu, Payyannoor Aravindan

Released briefly in 1981, Abraham's third feature is set in the Kuttanad rice-fields of Kerala, the director's home province. Cheriyachan is a typical landlord who feels threatened by industrialisation and by leftist activists. When he witnesses the police massacring poor peasants, he takes upon himself the guilt of his class, as well as the guilt of the voyeur. He is last seen up a coconut tree trying to

keep away from the police. It is Abraham's achievement that this figure, steeped in the local mix of feudal and Christian traditions, becomes understandable as a frightened victim of history whereas most films would cast him as a one-dimensional villain or a grotesquely comic character. The film is Abraham's most controlled, opening with a series of sweeping shots on the famed backwaters of the region, as it establishes both the strongly realist and quasi-mythic flavour necessary to allow for the transference of economic oppression into the condition of Cheriyachan's guilt.

Special Jury Award for Direction and Best Actor Award, Kerala State Film Awards



Amma Ariyan

(Report to Mother)
115 mins | Malayalam
1986

Director John Abraham **Producer** Odessa Movies **Story, Script and Dialogue** John Abraham **Cinematography** Venu **Editing** Beena **Music** Sunitha **Cast** Joy Mathew, Maji Venkitesh, Nilambur Balan, Harinarayanan, Kunhulakshmi Amma, Ittingal Narayani, Nazim, Ramachandran Mokeri, Kallai Balan, Thomas, Venu C. Menon

The first film of the Odessa Collective and the last by John Abraham, Amma Ariyan was made as a people's film by the money obtained from the ordinary people of Kerala. Purushan sets out for Delhi for his research, promising his mother to write to her wherever he is. The film is in the form of a letter written by Purushan to his mother. On his way he finds a dead body, which he later

identifies as that of Hari's. Purushan decides to go Hari's house to inform his mother about her son's death. On his way he meets some of Hari's friends, and the character Hari in the film unfolds as the memories of these friends about him, mostly conflicting. They too join Purushan in his journey. As they reach Hari's house, the small group that started the journey develops into a crowd of young men. A complex film, Amma Ariyan is made from interweaving fact and fiction. John filmed actual quarry worker's strike for Amma Ariyan. The troubled political history of Kerala in the 70s is narrated during the film occasionally and a generation's radical past is reevaluated.

Special Jury Award for Direction and Best Actor Award, Kerala State Film Awards



John about John

By John Abraham

I think I was born on August 11, 1937. I am not sure. Kuttanadu [in Alleppey district] is my native place, but I was born in Kunnamkulam [in Thrissur district]. As you can see, I was born before Independence. My father used to be associated with an underground political movement. They once organized a procession. That became a police case. Those days, the police wouldn't hesitate to arrest anyone if they wanted to. My father went in hiding. That is when my mother was about to give birth to me. We had a few relatives living at Kunnamkulam. My mother was secretly taken to Kunnamkulam where I was born.

After a while, we returned to Kuttanadu. I did my schooling there. I went to CMS College, Kottayam, for my Intermediary, completed my graduation from Marthoma College, Thiruvalla [in Kottayam district] with Economics as main, though my real interest was in Literature. I couldn't get a seat in Literature. I went to Dharwad University to do my Post Graduation in Political Science. I got a job in LIC before I could complete the course.

I have participated in political activities during my college days. I have won an election as independent candidate. In fact, my politics was similar to that of my father. My initiation into politics was the result of the persuasion of a few local workers. Those days, the most intense fight

in college union elections at Marthoma College used to be for the post of Arts Club secretary. And I contested in that post. My opponent was a local guy from Kottayam itself, while I was from Kuttanad. Nevertheless, I won.

The Communist Movement was emerging stronger during those days. Though I used to be a close ally of the movement, I never used to participate in their activities in any significant manner. But I used to like their activities a lot.

Ours used to be a "middle class orthodox family". Everyone in the family used to be a bit too interested in religious matters. I never liked going to the church. However, upon my father's insistence, I used to go to church once in a while until the age of 15.

I had started watching films at the age of 15. I wanted to become a famous singer. But this [filmmaker] is what I have turned out to become. Maybe because I liked this medium. I think I had started developing a clandestine desire to become a filmmaker from my childhood. I remember telling my friends that I will make a film one day. My grandfather was the reason for my interest in cinema. He was a retired engineer. He used to have a lot of books on photography and cinema, as well as an old camera and a projector. "Really he was a genius." I am not even half as talented as him. My grandfather was my guru. He taught me how to watch a film. Didn't I mention that he used to have a lot of books? He used to make me sit and read all of them. And he would reward me with a coin or two for reading

them. In short, I was his kid. I bear his name – John. His full name was Jacob John.

I worked at LIC for 3 years. In 1965, I joined the Pune Film Institute. Initially, what I felt is confusion, when I started watching unseen films at the institute. Gradually, I had to change my ideas about cinema fundamentally. Each film that I watched would be a new experience and would give new ideas. Bergman, Antonioni, Louis Bunuel, Kurosawa... we used to watch all the films of these "masters". But frankly, I never wanted to imitate any of them. "I must create something new." And that used to be the main dilemma – to create something completely one's own.

In 1969, after coming out from the institute, my first "work" was for Uski Roti with Mani Kaul. That was a huge experience. I liked Uski Roti's "content". The story was of the famous Hindi playwright Mohan Rakesh. Me and Mani Kaul prepared the screenplay from Delhi. Meanwhile, I got another offer – to make a documentary on Himalayas for Films Division. In fact, I was not supposed to direct the film. The one who was supposed to direct it had an accident, and the project came to me. That was my first "assignment". That doesn't mean my first film. When I returned from the Himalayas after the shooting for that film, Mani got my load sanctioned from FFC. Me and Mani stayed at Mohan Rakesh's house and prepared the rough format of Uski Roti. It was me who went to the location first. When I first saw Uski Roti after its completion, I didn't like it. "I didn't like the form." Because Uski Roti was a "senti-

mental story"; I thought it is "hypocritical" to "drain out" that "sentimentalism" from it and give it a "form" like that. "If there is a sentiment in the content, that should be there on the screen also." Once I told this to Mrinal Sen... after watching his Akash Kusum... that it is the story of a musician, but still it didn't have a single song. That should not happen. It is more unethical not to include songs in a film when it is necessary, than including songs even when not necessary. If the latter is the result of ignorance, the former is "intellectual masturbation".

After Uski Roti, I came to Madras. A number of Institute-people like me, Asad, K G George, Balu Mahendra stayed in a lodge. That is when I made Vidyarthikale Ithile Ithile; Asad was the inspiration.

After that, I planned to make the film Joseph Enna Purohithan. That was a story that me and Sakkaria wrote for screen. While working on the script of this film, I first conceived the theme for the film Agaharathil Kazhuthai. One day evening, I and Sakkaria were walking through a Brahmin neighbourhood. There were a lot of donkeys around. They were fascinating to look at. We talked about that. I started thinking: we have all kinds of animals as pets; but nobody makes a donkey one's pet... What would happen if a Brahmin decides to make a donkey his pet? I knew the life of Brahmins there. This was the context from which I conceived Kazhuthai. It was my own creation from the beginning to the end. It was released in 1978. When I watched it, I definitely felt that I could



have made it better. Due to constraints in the budget, we could not capture the film on screen the way we wanted to. You might find many limitations when one analyses it methodically. Nevertheless, I do not think those limitations affected the core of the film in any significant way. The Tamil Nadu government denied/banned the film's screening in the state. R Veerappan was behind it. The film had been chosen as the best regional film; that was another reason. In fact, the film was not criticising any community. They themselves were convinced of that later. But by then, I had lost the opportunity to screen the film in Tamil Nadu. Janashakthi Films brought the distribution rights. They should have insisted on its release in Tamil Nadu, but they didn't. If you make a film, you should show it to people. I knew that the audience would have loved Kazhuthai. But people are compelled to watch only Amitabh Bachchan and MGR. This maligns appreciation. Let us promote watching good films. [On the other hand], those films that claim to be different from conventional films – those that are made for four or five intellectuals – are just intellectual masturbation.

I cannot accept that. Films are to be understood by everyone. And they should be close to the lives of people. I started Cheri-yachante Krurakrthyangal in 1980. That was a story close to my heart. It was based on a political experience from my native place. Precisely for these reasons, I was in a dilemma while writing the script. A peasant revolt happened in Kuttanad. One section killed six people from the opposite

side. They escaped. One guy got caught up in all this: he was a petty bourgeois. He was my relative too. After this incident, he fled from the place, and joined a seminary. This guilt - feeling became the subject of the film. It is about the mental conflicts of Cheri-yachan. But I had not planned to make the political contexts part of my film. All I attempted to do was portray a few events with Cheri-yachan's agonies at its centre. That is Cheri-yachan's story.

I planned to make a documentary on E M S Namboodiripad. I even finished shooting parts of it. CPM's national conference was taking place in Thiruvananthapuram. They didn't know about my political identity. They were not interested either. But they thought it is essential to make a documentary on EMS – today or tomorrow.

After completing Cheri-yachan, I used to wander around for a while. Many producers approached me. I didn't encourage them. At the most, I will borrow Rs 5 or 10, get drunk and convince them that I cannot make the films that they have in their minds.

I had plans to make a film based on the events in Kayyur. I had completed the script too. But then the producer backed out. After that, I staged a street play named Naykkali (Dog Play) in Fort Kochi. Naykkali means something like a chess game. There is no defeat or victory though. Later, a few youngsters came and talked to me about starting a small cultural forum. This group grew and later came to be known as 'Odessa'.

The Indian concept of 'mother' is unique. For us, mother is the source of energy/strength. To be more precise, the source of the man's strength is the woman – the mother. Despite all theories and philosophies, our culture teaches us that the destruction of the woman/the mother results in the destruction of humanity. This was the idea behind Amma Ariyan. Without recognizing this concept, there is no point in talking about women's liberation, etc. Similarly, patriarchy is a superficial ideology. I believe that mothers should be told about the problems that we face in our lives as men. Their responses to them might offer solutions to a lot of them. In other words, without awakening our mothers, it is impossible to achieve our goals. All our epics tell us the same. The materialistic modern world seems to have forgotten this. I decided to make a film based on this theme precisely for this reason.

This film [Amma Ariyan] does not follow any convention or form that has already been followed until now. So, the characters in the film are not imaginary, but contextual. In other words, characters appear depending on the context. The film is structured as chapters in the form of reports. These reports can be in the form of the perspective of a character. In another context, it could be from the perspective of the event itself. Or else from the perspective of the director. This is not a unique style. Objectivity becomes important only on very few occasions. On all other occasions, I have tried to express my "subjective outlook" through the visuals. For example, apart from dialogues, I have used

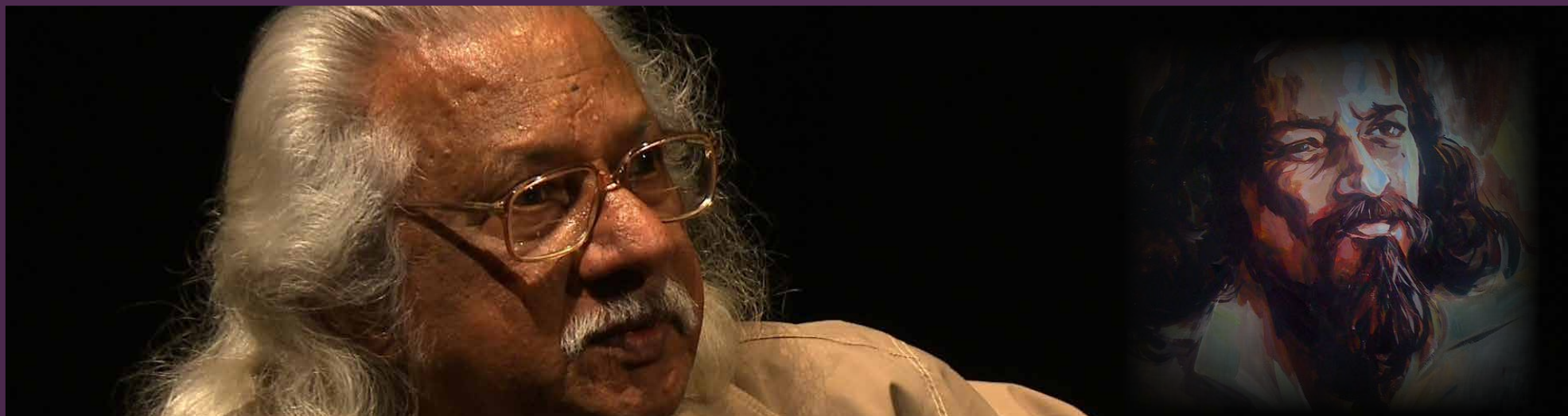
my own commentary, and on occasion the monologues of characters that express their "subjective outlook".

I have deployed realism in this film following the concept of musical symphony – i.e., "music and counter point". The dialectics of two beams with different music – that is the basis of realism in the film.

The concept of time used in this film is more dynamic than the conventional concept about time. Space/where it happens is not a concern, because it has a "time concept" that is universal, if you may call it so. I have tried reconstructing some events that took place during certain historical periods – one event from 1972, another from 1981, etc. As things were portrayed in simple manner, I never had the fear that it would fail to communicate. Nobody would say 'I didn't understand the film', though it may not go down well with a few.

Black & White has a different sensibility compared to colour. I thought Black & White suits this theme. Especially since the reports have the nature of documentation.

From the book *John Abraham* edited by Shaji, KN, published by Niyogam Books, Kochi (1993/94).



Remembering John

By Adoor Gopalakrishnan

It's been a long while since our beloved John Abraham left all of us. Any attempts to confine his exceptional genius, who left us in unusual circumstance in adjectives or clichés are bound to fail. John never had friends or foes in the extremes. If anyone claims otherwise, it would have to be treated with suspicion. If someone describes him as a prophet who belonged to an extraordinarily lofty plane, I would tend to agree.

Though older, he was three years junior to me at Pune Film Institute which he joined after resigning his job in L.I.C at Kumbhakonam, Tamil Nadu. Typically, first year students would be ignored as novices by their seniors in any educational institution. However, probably for his captivating personality, John attracted our attention and affection. There would always be a

bunch of mates around the articulate John. Drama, Painting, Music, literature - be it anything, he had an uncommon grasp and enthusiasm. Sporting a playful smile he was a natural hitting punch line in any debate.

This was a period when all the students at the Institute were struck by the magical spell of Ritwik Ghatak, who was the vice-principal and Professor of Direction. I remember John's arrival at the institute with some fascination for the period. Naturally they got along quite well. I've heard people say Ghatak expected John to have the brightest future of all his students.

If anyone asks for the most important aspect of John's cinema, I would have to mention at the outset, their engrossing black humor. The protagonist riding a motorcycle by pedaling on the starter (Students, this way, 1972), milkman attempting to fool the cow to yield milk by propping up a calf with straws (Donkey in the Brahmin ghetto, 1977), towards the

end in the movie, Cruelties of Cheriachan (1979) the scene is titled "Ascent" with a long shot of the actor perched on top of a coconut tree, and in the same movie you might as well remember Cheriachan's mother narrate her story in monologue in the burial ground right after her death - like soul inside a body all these stood for a universal vision embodied in unique narrative techniques. Artists who cherished the dead and the living, the exciting and the lifeless with the same intensity of indulgence and affection are not to be found anywhere except John. The scene in the Brahmin Ghetto where the lid of a coffin is opened repeatedly revealing the dead body in a mortuary and the still born child in "To Mother" (1986) clearly underline the above.

His unbridled and uninhibited lifestyle and the art that sucked its blood and sweat were merged irretrievably and inevitably by destiny for sure. His life was like a puzzle in a surreal scenario where a theatrical enactment of tragedy rumored,

forewarned, accepted and inexorably took place in the end. We realize that with a jolt now. How can we ever say that the scenes from his own life when he lay unrecognized in the Calicut medical college mortuary like a vagabond for days were not adapted by John as he did in "To Mother"? The intellect that distilled the puzzles of life into art and then life itself and even death left a lot of unknowns in the dark.

John was a compulsive traveler, without any belongings, mostly without even another pair of clothing. John can be anywhere-in conscious or unconscious state; inebriate or sober; in groups or alone. We were together when the only time John traveled abroad, to Italy for Pessaro film festival.

The new pair of shoes that Odessa organizers bought for him did not fit his feet. Nevertheless he was wearing it in the Bombay airport. It was only a few minutes for the flight to depart before we realized John had not done emigration clearance



and he was disheartened to be retreating and finally higher authorities intervened to walk alongside to help him fly are not quite the scenes to forget. When everyone took refuge in woolen clothes from the bone chilling cold in Pessaro, John wore cotton clothing on top of another refusing the sweater I offered. After the shows and dinner when everyone else withdrew back into the warmth of their bedrooms, this man was wide-awake and walked along the city to conjure the rhythm, sound and material from its nightlife. While our stay in Pessaro was for seven days, John had spent almost fourteen days. Within a few days we were convinced that John was the most popular, famous and liked participant among us in this Italian city. He did not need to speak Italian to achieve this.

Italy is known for the numerous film festivals conducted every year. Every city conducts one more festivals. As far I know John was invited for at least a dozen of them. The youthful and enthusiastic organizers wanted John to attend them even if

his films were not available. The picture of the radiant face of a middle aged bartender who tucked his hand upon his chest and held his breath and deep admiration for John who was stepping on to the stage to answer cineastes' questions after Brahmin's Ghetto was screened in Pessaro was incredible. I can never forget or erase the magical moment.

We were given a car to visit Rome on the last day of the festival. I had obtained permission to keep the car for the whole day so that I could show the city to John. I took this responsibility upon myself since I had been there three times already. I kept the following vignette in memory. Inside St.Peter's Basilica in Vatican and inhaling the enchanting, resplendent and holy majesty that condensed over centuries, John confessed with pride and a mischievous tinkle in his eyes: "Standing here if a Christian bloke felt a bit cocky, you can't really blame him".

The journey's triumph and the serene hal-
low of fulfillment and satisfaction passed

on his smile to me.

I understood later that Pessaro was a major reinforcement for John. He afterwards completed "To Mother". He spoke of each step in production with a lot of excitement. How many of them including Rossellini's son Jill, John promised to come back with the new film? Everyone who cared for him including myself truly believed he had just entered a new phase of artistic endeavor. Unfortunately for Malayalam films, the thing called fate that some believe and others don't did not let it happen.

Once after a long interval, John visited my home. He asked my daughter: "Who asked you to grow up?"

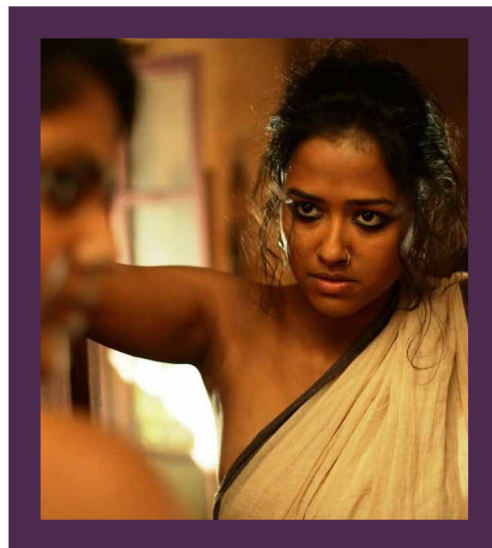
I would like to ask him in return: "Dear John, who asked you to die?"

Adoor Gopalakrishnan is one of the most renowned directors from Kerala. This tribute to John features in his book Cinema, Literature and Life.

Representation of Muslims in Bengali Cinema

By Nadira Khatun

Bengali Muslims never acquired prominent screen space on Bengali silver screen unlike Indian Hindi cinema where Muslims were represented adequately as well as involved actively in making those visuals. Nevertheless, the representational format of Bengali Muslims started changing from pre partition history of Bengali cinema to current times, intertwining socio-political situation of that time. If we look back, Muslims did not share any screen space with majority Hindus during post-independence era. The films released in later years such as *Ghare Baire* (directed by Satyajit Ray, 1983), *Padma Nadir Majhi* (directed by Goutom Ghosh 1993), *Rajkahini* (directed by Srijit Mukherjee, 2015) which were set in the backdrop of partition and the narratives demanded some Muslim protagonists in those films. Though post-independence era is considered as golden era of Bengali cinema where international auteurs like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Bimal Roy and Mrinal Sen delivered their remarkable works, but there is hardly any film where Muslims are represented in their films. They were internationally acclaimed because of their neo-realist approach which made them portray reality and struggles of ordinary people. Though they only showcased the hardship of ordinary Hindu citizens of the country ignoring the people of other communities, specially Muslims who constituted a majority of the popula-



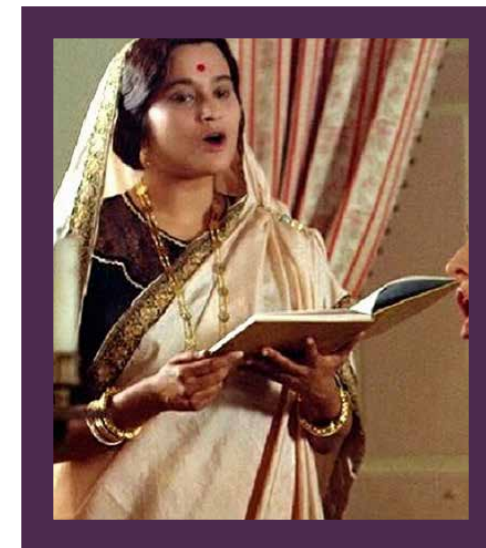
tion. To analyse the trend, we need to look at the status of Muslims and Hindu-Muslim relationship within Bengal from a historical point of view.

American historian Broomfield correctly described that Bengali Muslims of colonial Bengal as “the forgotten majority” (Broomfield, 1968). The exclusionist nature of the bhadralok public sphere as a Bengali-Hindu arena made the Bengali Muslims of Colonial Bengal almost invisible. Andy and Azad commented that “for too many Hindu bhadralok the Muslims did not exist except as objects of occasional high-minded concern” (Cited in Raju. J. H.: 2015). One of the primary reasons for the invisibility of Bengali Muslims from public sphere is the absence of a large enough, English-educated middle-class among them. Ramkrishna Mukherjee pointed out, the 1871 census report of Bengal, “the Mussalmans form a very large majority of the cultivators of the

ground and of the day labourers”. Thus, the middle-class that developed in Bengal by the end of the nineteenth century was composed almost entirely of the Hindus. Middle class Hindus did not have the equal status and position like western bourgeoisie, but Renaissance politics stabilised the status of middle-class Bengali Hindus. As a result, they acquired the position of the intellectual Bengali bhadralok.

Bengali Muslims are often called as ‘yavan’ (Outsiders) or ‘nede’ (inferiors) by Bengali bhadralok Hindus. The evidence becomes clear from one of the most prominent novelists such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Sunil Gangopadhyay who attributed the term ‘nede’ to describe Muslims. These two words have different connotations but both are used in a derogatory sense. They were never considered as social equals and not accommodated in the Bengali-Hindu public sphere. The process of excluding Bengali Muslims continued till 19th century and the trend was reflected in the Bengali film industry.

Bengali Hindu bhadralok led Calcutta film industry and Hindu Bengali culture became a common narrative in the pre-and post-independent films. There were very few films which had Muslim characters, on the other there was no representation of Muslims in Bengali film-making. Thus, Bengali Muslims simply became captive audience of Bengali cinema. There are probably two reasons of exclusion: 1) Bengali Muslims’s non-participation in the performing arts for centuries and that resulted in making Muslim actors and actresses nearly non-existent 2) a large capital was required to produce a film and



Bengali Muslims did not have that.

Whenever Muslims are represented in the narrow cinematic space, they were represented mostly as marginalized section of the society. In the film *Ghare Baire* (1983) based upon the novel *Ghare Baire* by Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray set the film in early 20th century India (specifically, 1907) in the estate of the rich Bengali noble, Nikhilesh (Victor Banerjee) and in the chaotic aftermath of Lord Curzon’s partition of Bengal. It portrays a picture of post-partition and the complex nuances of Hindu-Muslim relation of the time. Muslims are represented as working class who are chaotic and manipulated by the Britishers and Nikhilesh, being a noble person, is trying to pacify the tension and doing welfare work for the community. Through different dialogues, Ray pointed out multiple times the complex nuances of the



community and inter-community relationship but we hardly find any representation of the Muslims. Another landmark film, Padma Nadir Majhi (1993), an Indo-Bangladesh joint production feature film, is based on Manik Bandyopadhyay's Padma Nadir Majhi. Goutom Ghosh represented the miseries and struggles of fishermen irrespective of any religion. The film is pictured in the backdrop of 1947 partition of India and east-Pakistan. The central protagonist, Hossain Miya, a Bengali Muslim wants to establish a little Utopia on an island in the Padma delta. He doesn't care if the people who populate it are Hindu or Muslim. Another recent film which is set at the backdrop of partition is Rajkahini (2015), directed by Srijit Mukherjee. This film revolves around the era of 1947 and explores the consequences of India-Pakistan partition in the area of Bengal. The main plot revolves around a group of sex workers, lives in one House (brothel) headed by Begum Jaan (Rituparna). Delving into the grim history of the partition, Mukherjee's movie Rajkahini is weaved around a border between the two nations that runs through a brothel housing eleven women.

The films Ghare Baire and Rajkahini portray the complex nuances and human sufferings due to partition of India-Pakistan. Muslims are represented as poor farmers and prostitute(s) respectively, the silent victims of the state's atrocities, powerless, much like the reality of Muslims, as they never held important positions which would let them exercise power. In Rajkahini, Srijit Mukherjee tries the blend the flavor of Muslim social and the Muslim courtesan genre, basically he focuses on the struggles of the eleven vulnerable

women. All their miseries and sorrows are controlled by the representatives of empowered sections of our society and they belong to upper-class male Hindus and east-Pakistani Muslims. On the other, in PadmaNadir Majhi, Hossain Miya exploits the villagers irrespective of religion. Padma Nadir Majhi explicitly focuses on Muslim characters but they did not carry any extra baggage of their identity, probably because the film was a joint production of India-Bangladesh.

The trend of representing Muslims in a narrow cinematic space has started changing in the recent times. Bengali Muslims are not invisible in the cinematic space anymore. Following the path of contemporary Hindi cinema, Bengali films have also started portraying Muslims as religious fanatics, underworld don or a good friend of the hero. Shudhu Tomari Jonno (2015), directed by Birsa Dasgupta, represented second lead protagonist, Shiraz Chowdhury, as deceitful lover who betrays his girlfriend for his religion. Aparna Sen's Arshinagar (2015), an adaptation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, set in Bengal, is a musical romance drama where Sen shows the romance between Ranajit Mitra and Julekha Khan. She tries to blend genre of modern age underworld don and Muslim Social.

From the beginning, the romance between Julekha and Ranajit is defined by a Hindu male gaze motivated by a curiosity to penetrate the exoticism of the other. To make the religious identity neutral, the film does not portray Muslims as only criminal leaders. The most recent and controversial film of recent time is Zulfiqar (directed by Srijit Mukherjee, 2016). Srijit Mukherji

introduces us to the system of black marketing in the ports of Kolkata. Following the Shakespearean adaptation of Julius Ceasar and Anthony and Cleopatra, the film portrays the story of Zulfiqar Ahmed, the prominent leader of The Syndicate (a powerful organisation which controls the underworld life of the city).

Muslims are visible in the cinematic space now but they are represented negatively. The film Zulfiqar started its promotion with the introduction of Kolkata and in the backdrop, narrator says, "in the land of bridge, in the land of Durga Puja, in the land of Rabindranath Tagore". While glorifying the heritage and culture of Kolkata and overall Bengal, suddenly, the visuals are changed to blood on the frame of Tagore with sounds of bullets in the background. While narrator continues, "a small country inside the city of Kolkata, (in an emphasizing tone), "yes a country, only without national anthem and a flag". The images that follow are about brutality, violence, butchery, infidelity, suggestions of betrayal and Muharram processions, where young boys are playing with swords and chains, children are reciting Quran, and men are offering prayers in congregation, etc.

Hence if we look at the representation of Muslims in the recent times, Muslims identity has been reduced to religious fanatics, underworld don and prostitutes. Apart from walking on the tested formulas of Hindi cinema of representing Muslims with stereotyped attributes such as exoticism, gangsters, terrorists, courtesan, and underworld don, a Muslim is also represented as lead protagonist's best friend in Borbad (directed by Raj Chakraborty,

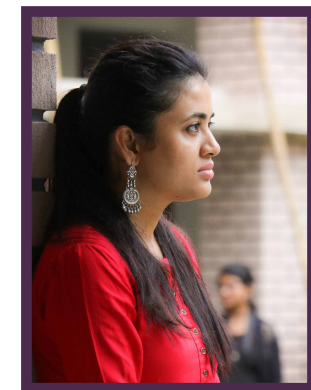
2014). The trend of representing Muslims in Bengali cinema is very new. Thus, we can't say any particular trend or genre. Directors are only following the tested formula of Bollywood film industry of representing Muslims as age-old stereotypes as barbarous, jihadi, murderer, savage, exoticism and other etc.

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Index

films

- III Smoking Barrels, 11
Amma Ariyan, 81
Achinha Saba, 75
Afternoon Clouds, 74
Anadi Dhara, 52
A Dream Takes Wing, 52
Al-Kabirah, 73
Asha Jaoar Majhe, 25
Capital I, 12
Chafa, 76
Cheriyachente Kroora Krithyangal, 81
Chidambaram, 50
Chitrokar, 38
Chauthi Koot, 16
Court, 17
Dahani ku nei Galpo, 36
Estheppan, 49
Gaali Beeje, 9
Harikatha Prasanga, 32
Kaadu Pookkunna Neeram, 30
Kamuki, 71
Kanchana Seeta, 47
Kaasav, 24
Kummatty, 48
Kutramme Thandanai, 35
Loktak Lairembe, 27
Maaj Raati Keteki, 34
Manhole, 21
Marattam, 50
Masaan, 18
Meruku Thodachi Malai, 29
Munroe Island, 13
Neend, 22
Onyo Oppala, 31
Orukedayin Karunnai Manu, 28
Ottaal, 20
Pahada Ra Luha, 41
Pokkuveyil, 49
Revelations, 33
Shuka Asuchi, 39
Song of the Horned Owl, 15
Thampu, 48
The Bright Day, 23
The Head Hunter, 10
The Seer Who Walks Alone, 51
The Violin Player, 14
Thithi, 40
The Truth Embedded, 72
Turup, 19
Uttaranayam, 47
Vasthuahara, 51
Verge, 77
Village Rockstars, 26
The Waterfall, 37



Index

directors

Abraham John, 81
Aravindan G, 47-50
Bardoloi Santwana, 34
Bharathi Lenin, 29
Bhattacharya Amartya, 12
Bhave Sumitra, 24
Borah Manju, 15
Collective Ektara, 19
Damodar Biju kumar, 30
Darai Lipika Singh 36, 37
Das Rima, 26
Dasgupta Subhajit, 22
Deodhar Mansi, 78
Dey Sanjib, 11
Dutta Nilanjan, 10
Jayaraj, 20
Jaypal Vijay, 33
Kapadia Payal, 74
Karun Shaji, 52
Kasaravalli Ananya, 32

Kumar Paban Haobam, 27
Mohapatra Sabyasachi, 41
Manikandan M, 35
Manu P.S, 13
Mitra Saibal, 38
Mohanty Sankalp, 75
Mukherji Baudhayan, 14
Parija Abhishek, 73
Prasad Eshwar Babu, 9
Reddy Ram, 40
Samson Antony, 77
Sangaiah Suresh, 28
Sanyal Satrupa, 31
Singh Gurvinder, 16
Takalkar Mohit, 23
Tamhane Chaitanya, 17
Tomy Christo, 71
Vasudevan Anusuya, 74
Vincent Vidhu, 21



Index

languages

Assamese, 11
Assamese, 26
Assamese, 34
Bengali, 25
Bengali, 31
Bengali, 34
Bodo, 15
English,
English,
Hindi, 14
Hindi, 18
Hindi, 19
Hindi, 22
Hindi, English 23
Kannada, 9
Kannada, 32
Kannada, 17
Kannada, 40
Malayalam, 13
Malayalam, 20
Malayalam, 21
Malayalam, 30
Malayalam,
Malayalam,
Malayalam,

Malayalam,
Malayalam,
Malayalam,
Malayalam,
Malayalam, 47- 52
Manipuri, 27
Marathi, 17
Marathi, 24
Odia, 36
Odia, 39
Odia, 41
Odia, 12
Odia, 77
Punjabi, 16
Silent, 78
Silent, 79
Tamil, 28
Tamil, 29
Tamil, 33
Tamil, 35
Wancho, 10



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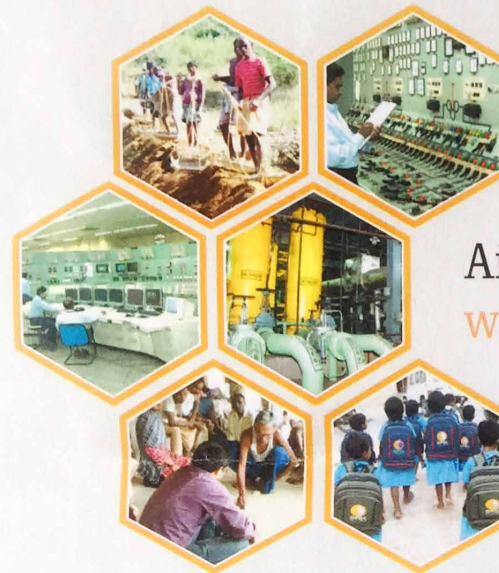
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