

INDIA  
INTERNATIONAL  
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# 50 CREATIVE YEARS OF **ADOOR** **GOPALAKRISHNAN &** **SWAYAMVARAM@50**

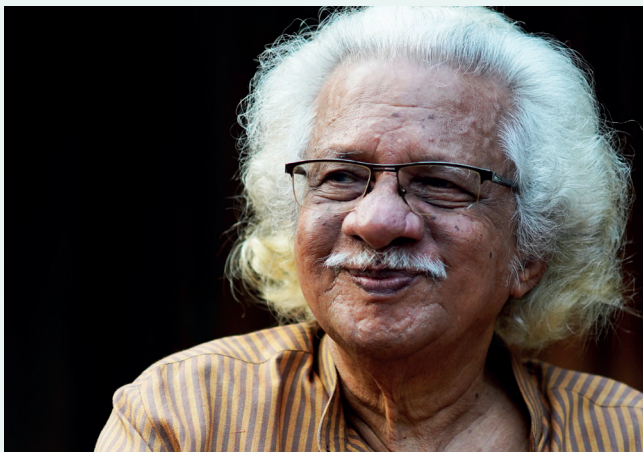


A commemorative retrospective of select films  
of **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**, as he completes  
50 creative years of film making.

# CURATOR'S NOTE

Swayamvaram, (translated as One's own choice from Malayalam), the 1972 first film of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, begins with a bus journey of its central characters.

Fifty years ago, it was a new journey for Adoor, the film auteur, as well as Malayalam language films of Kerala. A journey, which is being celebrated by the world of meaningful films, with many a prestigious international and national honours. These honours include India's Dada Sahib Phalke award for Lifetime achievement in films (2006), Padma Vibushan, 2nd civilian highest honour of the country (2006), Sutherland Trophy from the British Film Institute (1982), and Commander of the order of Arts & Letters (2004) of France. A French film critic Jean Michel Fordon says Adoor's films, "not only proclaim his own achievement, but serve as a kind of anthem for



the very nature of film-making at its best." In a way Adoor defined what a complete film is for Keralites and Indians in general.

Adoor flagged off the film society movement of Kerala in 1965, just as Satyajit Ray established his Calcutta film society in 1947, to create an audience for his kind of films. His debut feature film was also a result of a unique experiment of a film cooperative for production of films. Both the film society and film cooperative which Adoor pioneered were named as Chitralekha. Swayamvaram bagged four national honours, for the best film, best director, best cinematography and best actress, establishing him as the pioneer of the 1970s new wave of films from Kerala. Adoor, the 1965 batch, Pune Film Institute trained film maker has made a total of 12 feature films and 25 documentaries in the last 50 years. All of his films are deeply rooted in Malayalam language and its culture, but made for a global audience. In a way he sculpted through his films, Kerala's life and times as seen by his generation through a prism of global film canvas. His material as a film maker remains deeply embedded with the people of Kerala, their various struggles with changing realities of society, politics, psychology, and human greed.

**V K Cherian,**  
*Curator*

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**For a detailed analysis**

<https://english.mathrubhumi.com/features/specials/50-years-of-swayamvaram-how-adoor-changed-the-grammar-of-malayalam-cinema-v-k-cherian-1.8075296>

# SCHEDULE OF THE ADOOR RETROSPECTIVE

**Dates:** 5,7,8, 9,12, 20, and 21 December 2022  
**Venue:** C.D.Deshmukh Auditorium, India International Centre,  
 40 Max Mueller Road, New Delhi.

<b>05 December   6.00 pm   Inaugural: Swayamvaram</b>	(One's Own Choice/1972/125 min)
<b>07 December   6.30 pm   Kodyettam</b>	(Ascent/1977/128 min)
<b>08 December   5.30 pm   Koodiyattam</b>	(2001/Documentary/180 min)
<b>09 December   6.30 pm   Elipathayam</b>	(The Rat Trap/1981/121 min)
<b>12 December   6.30 pm   Anantharam</b>	(Monologue/1987/125 min)
<b>20 December   6.30 pm   Mathilukal</b>	(The Walls/1990/117 min)
<b>21 December   5.00 pm   Images and Reflections</b>	(on Adoor by Girish Kasaravalli / 80 min)
<b>  6.30 pm   Vidheyan</b>	(The Servile/1993/112 min)

Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Mamooty, lead actor of three of the films, are expected to be present for the Retrospective.

Adoor Gopalakrishnan is a recipient of the Padma Vibhushan (2006), Dada Sahib Phalke-Award (2005), Sutherland Trophy Award (1982) from the British Film Institute (1982) and Commander of the Order of Arts & Letters (2004) from the Government of France. During his 50 years of creative journey, Adoor has won several national and international film festival

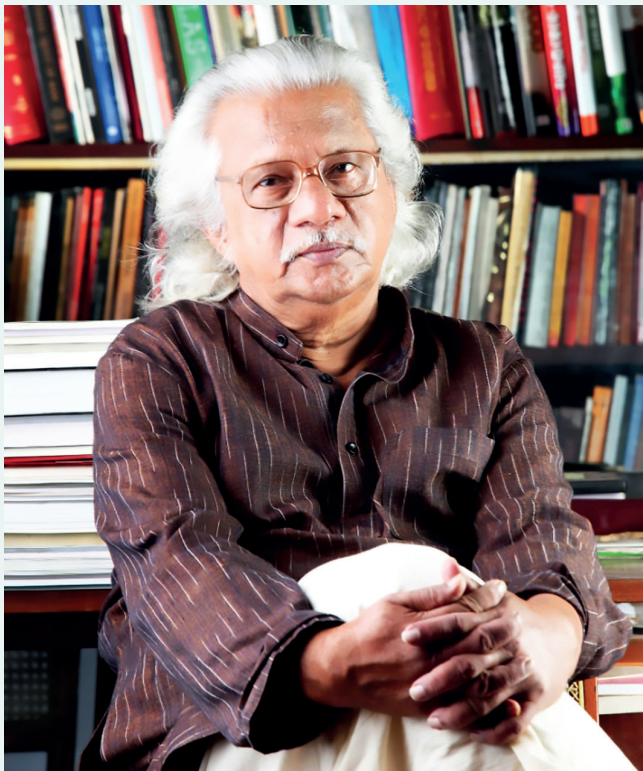
honours. Four books in English and another five in Malayalam have been published on him and about his 12 feature films and 30 documentaries. Four short films have been made on him. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, Cinematheque in Paris, La Rochelle, Pesaro, Lincoln Centre- New York, Fribourg, Lyons, Ljubljana, Munich etc. have honoured Adoor by holding a complete retrospective of his work.

Adoor has served on the juries of Venice, Singapore (Chair), Hawaii, Fribourg (Chair) Alexandria (Chair), New Delhi, Sochi, Shanghai, Dubai (Chair), Cairo (Chair), Valladolid (Chair), Goa (Chair).

Curated by  
**V K Cherian**,  
 film writer and  
 senior Media  
 person.

# PROFILE OF ADOOR GOPLAKRISHNAN

Writer – Director Adoor Gopalakrishnan was born in Kerala, India in 1941 into a family that patronized Kathakali and other classical performing arts. He started acting on the amateur stage at the early age of eight. Wrote and directed several stage plays during his student days.



Adoor had his graduation from the Gandhigram Rural University in 1960 specializing in Economics, Political Science and Public Administration. He left the governmental job of a statistical investigator to study cinema at the Film Institute of India, Pune. On graduating in 1965 with specialization in Screenplay writing and Advanced Film Direction, he pioneered the film society movement in Kerala. The same year, he took the initiative to form India's first film co-operative for production, distribution and exhibition of quality films.

He has scripted and directed twelve feature films and about thirty Shorts and documentaries. Notable amongst the non-feature films are those on Kerala's performing arts.

His debut feature, Swayamvaram went on to win the national awards for best film, best director, best cameraman and best actress. The second film Kodiyettam bagged the national award for Best actor and best Malayalam film.

He has since received national awards for best director five times, best screen playwright twice and best film two times. Adoor's third feature, Elippathayam won him the coveted British Film Institute Award for 'the most original and imaginative film' of 1982. The International Film Critics Prize (FIPRESCI) has gone to him six times successively for Mukhamukham, Anantaram, Mathilukal, Vidheyan, Kathapurushan and Nizhalkkuthu. Winner of several international awards like the UNICEF film prize



Adoor receives the BFI honour for *Elipathayam*

(Venice), OCIC film prize (Amiens), INTERFILM Prize (Mannheim) etc, his films have been shown in Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, London, Nantes, Rotterdam and every important festival around the world.

His collection of essays, *CinemayudeLokam* (The World of Cinema) was given the national award for the Best book on Cinema in 1984.

In 2002, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington honoured him by holding a complete retrospective of his work. Other major retrospectives of his films include those at the Cinematheque in Paris, La Rochelle, Pesaro, Lincoln Centre- New York, Fribourg, Lyons, Ljubljana, Munich etc. He has served on the juries of Venice, Singapore (Chair), Hawaii, Fribourg (Chair) Alexandria (Chair), New Delhi, Sochi, Shanghai, Dubai (Chair), Cairo (Chair), Valladolid (Chair), Goa (Chair) etc.

International film festivals of Denver, Cairo, MAMI (Bombay), Colombo and New Jersey have honoured him with Life Time Achievement Awards. In recognition of his contribution to in-

ternational cinema. Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala conferred on him the honorary degree of D. Litt. In the year 2006, when he received India's top civilian award, Padma Vibhushan for his contribution to the Arts (Cinema).

In 2010 the University of Kerala conferred on him the honorary degree of D.Litt. On 15th April, 2013 the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee formally inaugurated 'The Adoor Gopalakrishnan Film Archive and Research Fund' to preserve his films and also to encourage and promote study and research of his work. In 2014 he received the high honour of 'Deshikotama' (D.Litt.) from the Viswabharati University of Shantiniketan.

In 2015 he was awarded the Dr. Bhupen Hazarika International Prize for Life Time Achievement.

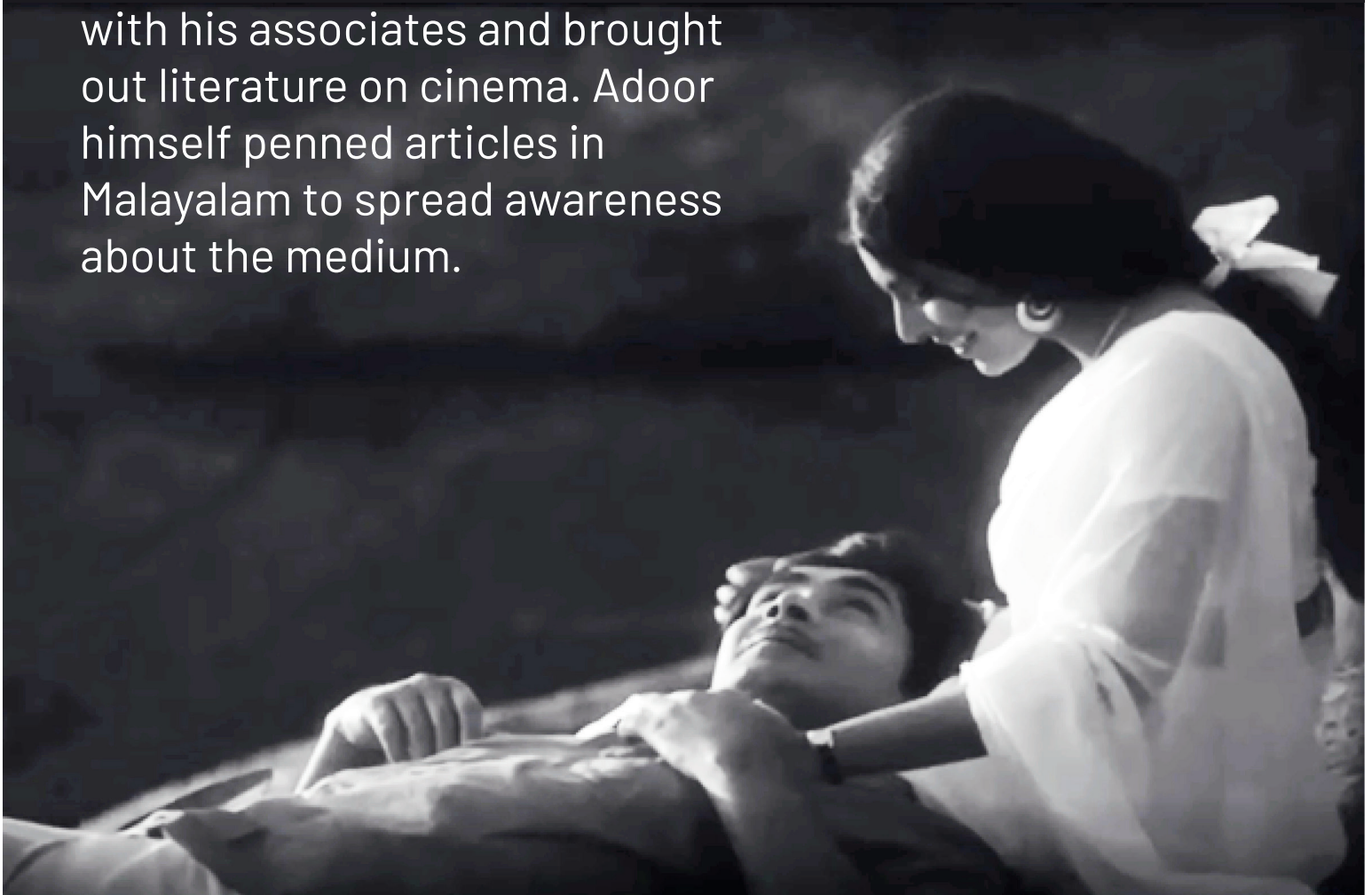
In 2017, he became the recipient of the 'J. C. Daniel Award' for Life Time Achievement in Cinema from the Govt. of Kerala. Also, the same year he became the recipient of the ICON Award given by the London Indian Film Festival.

# In The Forests of the Plight: A 50th Anniversary Tribute to Adoor Gopalakrishnan's First Film Swayamvaram (1972)

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by **Babu Subramanian**

Realizing the need for establishing a film culture, he took yet another initiative of setting up a film society along with his associates and brought out literature on cinema. Adoor himself penned articles in Malayalam to spread awareness about the medium.

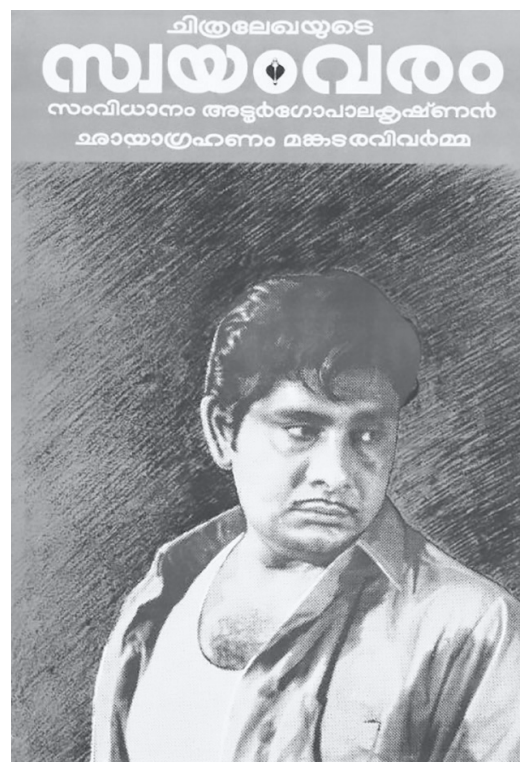


**W**hen Adoor Gopalakrishnan, one of the internationally acclaimed Indian filmmakers, launched his first feature film *Swayamvaram* five decades ago, it was after many years of sustained effort. After passing out of FTIL, Pune in 1965, he found it difficult to get a producer who would back him. Hence, he took the initiative of forming a cooperative for film production along with his friends. There was not much awareness of international cinema in his state of Kerala at that time. Realizing the need for establishing a film culture, he took yet another initiative of setting up a film society along with his associates and brought out literature on cinema. Adoor himself penned articles in Malayalam to spread awareness about the medium.

The establishing of the film cooperative helped Adoor in launching his first film *Swayamvaram* which was jointly financed by the erstwhile Film Finance Corporation and his Chitralekha film cooperative. It is based on a story and script by Adoor Gopalakrishnan who was assisted by K. P. Kumaran. The film won National Awards for Best Film, Best Director (Adoor Gopalakrishnan), Best Actress (Sharada) and Best Cinematography (Mankada Ravi Varma). The golden jubilee is an occasion to look at the film now, analyze it and place it in Adoor's oeuvre.

## Exposition

The film's opening title sequence is shot inside a bus with a variety of passengers, some of whom are dozing off. Among them is a young couple with their faces animated. They exchange glances. The bus comes to a halt and we see them checking into a hotel room. The



man asks his lover whether she regrets it. He wonders whether they gave enough thought to it. We realize that they might have eloped. A group of devotees pass by on the road in a procession chanting bhajan. It may appear odd to see the film showing the couple making love with the background of the bhajan on the sound track. The director's intention here is revealed in Adoor's interview in which he has said that he paired bhakti (devotion) with sex in that scene.<sup>[1]</sup> The essence of bhajan is bhakti. By being paired with bhakti, sex gets associated with devotion as another aspect of it. Separated from their families, they are mutually dependent on each other which leads to devotion as well as the fear of losing the loved one as seen in the dream sequences which follow.

## Synopsis

In *Swayamvaram*, a young couple, Sita (Sharada) and Vishwam (Madhu) fall in love perhaps against the wishes of their parents and leave their village to live together in the city. They face the challenge of surviving on their own in a climate of acute unemployment. As Vishwam's literary aspirations are crushed, he



takes up a teaching job but loses it. Later he gets only a low paying job of a clerk in a saw mill that too by replacing a dismissed employee who worked for twelve years there. Now that the couple have a child, Vishwam has to bear with the insinuation of the previous employee who stalks him. Vishwam is haunted by the hounding but his job is important to him. When he falls sick the situation becomes grave.

## Structure

Swayamvaram (1972) starts with the journey to the city of the young couple with their illusions followed by the hard reality they experience there. What Sita goes through has some parallel with the female protagonist Sita in the epic “Ramayana” which gives a resonance to the film. The title refers to the swayamvaram (meaning one’s own choice) of Sita who wedded Rama out of many princes in the epic. There is the picture depicting it that hangs on the wall of the house of Vishwam and Sita. Vishwam is her own choice for Sita in the film and not that of her family so it is a swayamvaram for her too. But Sita in the film is not exactly in the mould of Sita in the epic. She elopes with her lover to live together with him, making the subject daring for its time.



## In the Forests of the Plight

Just as Sita in the epic had to undergo hardships by having to go to forest, in the film also Sita has to go through adversities. The dream sequences in the early part of the film portend Sita losing Vishwam. He climbs down the rocks towards the sea as she keeps gesturing to him to come back. In another dream sequence Vishwam lies down keeping his head on the railway track with the approaching train’s sound on the sound track. She runs upto him and forces him to get up. In yet another sequence she chases him in the woods and loses him. It has memorable tracking shots of her running in the forest looking out for him. Sita being renounced by Rama in the last part of the epic (Uttarakandam) has its echo in Sita losing Vishwam in the end.

## Illusion & Reality

Sita and Vishwam are shown acting like lovers in commercial cinema in the dream sequences. The theme of illusion is taken up in a dream sequence showing posters of hero and heroine in love from Malayalam commercial cinema in which love is romanticized. Sita and Vishwam would have grown up watching



such films and imagined that life will be rosy as it is depicted in films. Later in *Swayamvaram* it turns out very hard to survive as job is very difficult to get for both of them. Without any support system Sita and Vishwam are dependent on each other. Reality dawns on Sita when Vishwam falls ill.

## Retrenchment Theme

Vishwam happens to see briefly a leftist party meeting in which the speaker talks about how the working class is misled by various parties. He adds that all of them obstruct the struggle of workers and their liberation. Much later in *Swayamvaram* after losing his job, there is a scene which shows a political march in protest against retrenching workers. Vishwam quietly watches it passing by. It seems the film was not given an award at the Moscow International Film Festival in which it was nominated. Adoor has said that the jury was surprised that Vishwam didn't join the march of the workers which costed the film an award. Vishwam himself has been retrenched from his job. Yet he doesn't join the march. Adoor has said that the reason is "he doesn't see himself as part of this. This has to be understood because the other thing is sim-

plistic that he also joins it. That's the kind of films we used to send to Moscow." [2] Vishwam doesn't belong to the working class. Hence it wouldn't have been appropriate to show him in the stock manner which would satisfy the expectation of the audience and an agenda driven jury. This is an important aspect of *Swayamvaram* which makes it stand apart.

The theme of retrenchment has been treated in its complexity in *Swayamvaram*. While the saw mill owner appears to be unfair in terminating a long-time employee, the friendly tutorial college owner with debts is forced to ask Vishwam to leave. The scene in which the owner takes Vishwam for a drinking spree is memorable.

## Safety and Security of Women

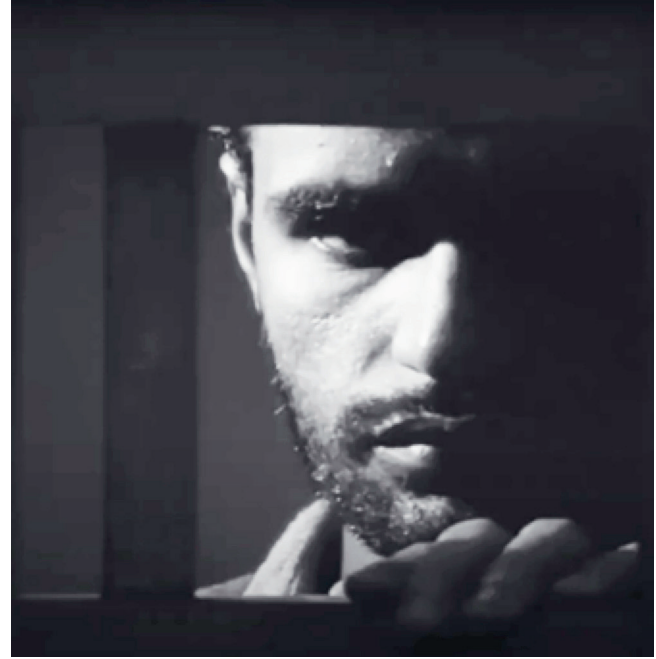
Women's safety is yet another theme in the film. Vikram and Sita move to a second hotel which is cheaper. Sita gives away her golden bangles, perhaps the only precious jewelry she has to Vishwam. It's for buying a mangalsutra (golden signet in a chain worn by a married woman) to let men know of her marital status and ward them off. This scene also suggests that Sita and Vishwam are living together perhaps without getting married.



Sita is terrified by the way she sees a drunkard when she opens the hotel room door on hearing the knocking of the door. She is even afraid of opening the door when Vishwam arrives. Sita wearing the mangalsutra doesn't restrain smuggler Vasu who has an eye on her. Three drunkards try to barge into her house and make unsavoury remarks about her.

### **The Women in the Film**

Swayamvaram came up with very well etched characters, particularly women. Sita is a bold woman who takes the courage to leave her family to live with her lover. She is resolute and strongly willed unlike Vishwam who keeps wondering whether they made the right choice. Kalyani (K.P.A.C. Lalitha), is a prostitute living in the opposite house whose husband visits her to collect money for liquor. She is smart enough not to let him exploit her at some point. The middle-aged widow Janaki (Adoor Bhavani), the rice seller neighbour of Sita, is very helpful to her. Sita protects herself from the prying eyes of men and lives with dignity. It is impossible for the smuggler Vasu to make advances to her as Kalyani says.



### **Casting**

Casting of Madhu as Vishwam was right as he underplays the role unlike most of the actors of that period who were known for their dramatic style of acting. Sharada was known as a talented actress and she had already won the National Award for Best Actress for Thulabharam (1968). She was the right choice for Sita and she got her second National award for Swayamvaram. Gopi turned out to be a great discovery by giving a haunting performance as the fired employee. The rest of the cast also performed well in the film.

### **The Ending**

In the end when Vishwam passes away, Vishwam's colleague suggests that she can live with his family. Janaki tells Sita to return to her parents. Sita rejects both the options. Once again, she makes her own choice. Her condition can be looked at in terms of the parallel of her situation with Sita in "Ramayana" who was renounced by Rama in Uttarakandam. In the last scene there are the sounds of thunder and pouring rain as Sita feeds her child. Water leaking from the roof falls down over the picture of swayamvaram on the wall which is lit up by

**In retrospect, the title reflects Adoor's own choice of treading the untrodden path of art cinema with all its risks. He has been hugely successful in creating a body of work that is world class and becoming a major force in Indian cinema.**



the lightning. The last shot is ambiguous as it shows Sita having an eye on the closed door, concerned about safety. While she is willing to face the world on her own, the future is uncertain.

Swayamvaram is one of the first Malayalam films that featured direct recording of sound (synchronized sound) and outdoor locales. It's also considered to be the first film in Indian cinema that used sound as a leitmotif: There is the recurrent sound of wood being cut in the saw mill. This cutting sound is especially powerful when Vishwam passes away.

In an interview with C.S. Venkiteswaran, Adoor has said that the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) rejected his application for finance for a film based on a script written by C.N. Sreekandan Nair as it was a love story. FFC didn't sanction the loan because the script didn't take up any of the issues facing India. [2] Perhaps the issue of unemployment that Swayamvaram deals with helped in getting the finance from FFC. To compare it with Adoor's second film onwards upto Anantaram, the approach in the latter is that of a biography of an individual. The films are very much rooted in the social landscape of Kerala but they are not issue based. Even in Sway-

amvaram, while the story deals with a social issue, it has other dimensions too. Its parallel with the epic "Ramayana" gives it a connotative meaning.

In retrospect the title reflects Adoor's own choice of treading the untrodden path of art cinema with all its risks. He has been hugely successful in creating a body of work that is world class and becoming a major force in Indian cinema. A pioneer of the new Malayalam cinema movement, he inspired several other art filmmakers. Swayamvaram's daring subject, complex treatment of the theme of retrenchment, parallel with the epic and ambiguous ending mark Adoor's first film, revealing an original style of filmmaking which has helped the film's longevity even after five decades.

#### References

1. VK Cherian in conversation with Adoor Gopalakrishnan, The creative world of Adoor Gopalakrishnan-Episode One-Swayamvaram Swayamvaram50 Channel on YouTube, 2022
2. C.S. Venkiteswaran in conversation with Adoor Gopalakrishnan, C.S. Venkiteswaran in Conversation with Adoor Gopalakrishnan Part 2: Film Societies, Festivals and Early Films, Sahapedia.org, 2021.

## GLOBAL REPORT

# Indian director deals in potent metaphors

Adoor Gopalakrishnan offers a clear and rigorous profile of his countrymen's lives

By David Sterritt

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

NEW YORK

AS the summer continues its barrage of blockbusters, it's important to remember that movies can be art as well as entertainment, and that memorable films are regularly made far from the sound stages of the Hollywood studios.

Manhattan's marvelous Walter Reade Theater, operated by the Film Society of Lincoln Center, is

## FILM

dedicated to these propositions. One of its major offerings this season is a series of ambitious works from India, directed by a *cinéaste* whose works deserve much more notice by American audiences.

The program is called "The Politics of Experience: New Indian Cinema by Adoor Gopalakrishnan," and while it isn't likely to make filmmaker Gopalakrishnan into a household name, it will at least remind the motion-picture world that India's movies range considerably beyond the popular potboilers and Satyajit Ray art films usually associated with that country.

Gopalakrishnan believes that

cinema, if thoughtfully and sensitively made, can reveal powerful truths about contemporary Indian life.

### Social pressures

For most filmmakers of his generation, who came to professional maturity during the 1970s, this goal is pursued through dramatic stories about compelling or unusual characters — the kind of material that typifies narrative movies all over the world.

What makes Gopalakrishnan's work stand out is his special concern with the social and cultural forces that act upon his characters, making them think and behave the way they do. Also praiseworthy is his avoidance of the simplistic psychologizing that such an approach could invite from a less-gifted artist.

The rigor and clarity of his approach are evident in movies from very different periods of his career. "Ascent," made in 1977, is about a young layabout whose wife and sister painfully show him the need for responsible living. "The Servile," just completed and having its United States premiere in the Walter Reade program, is about a groveling peasant who becomes implicated in his landlord's criminal acts.

### Colorful antiheroes

Both pictures center on men with deeply flawed personalities — so unfocused (in "Ascent") and



**THE SERVILE:** A spineless peasant becomes implicated in his landlord's criminal activity in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's film. Such antiheroes are shown to be the byproducts of their society.

cowardly (in "The Servile") that in a more commonplace movie they would elicit only pity or contempt from the audience. But working deliberately and methodically, Gopalakrishnan takes care to show how their deficiencies are reflected and even heightened by the social structures around them.

This allows the characters to function not merely as colorful antiheroes, designed to touch our feelings for a couple of hours and then fade forgettably away, but as poignant metaphors for the entire way of life that produced them — and Gopalakrishnan himself, who

was born and raised in the southern Kerala region where his films take place.

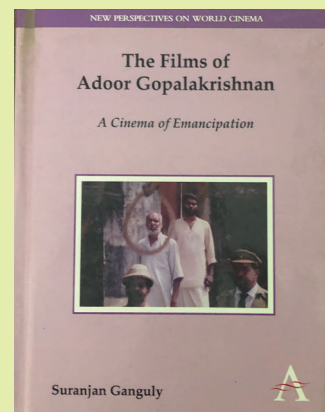
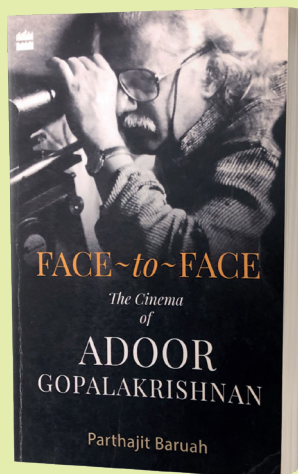
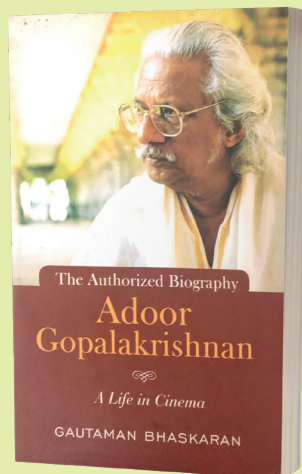
Although his work has evolved over the years, Gopalakrishnan's methods show impressive consistency. Separated by a decade and a half, "Ascent" and "The Servile" both have a leisurely pace and an episodic structure. As employed in the films, these qualities recall playwright Bertolt Brecht's use of an "alienation effect" to distance the audience from the emotions within his stories, encouraging active thought rather than passive absorption on the spectator's part.

"The Servile" enriches its appeal with a sensuous, sometimes breathtaking color scheme. But while this film has more visual and dramatic impact than the earlier "Ascent," it still makes no concessions to the Hollywood norms that cast a spell on so many directors.

### Ritualized theater

Gopalakrishnan has been influenced by the form of ritualistic Indian theater known as Kathakali, which has long flourished in the region where he lives. In Richard Schechner's stimulating book "Between Theater & Anthropology," the performance scholar notes that Kathakali actors strive

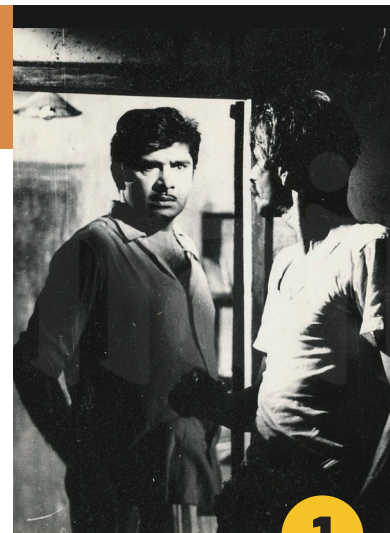
Christian science monitor on Adoor



# SWAYAMVARAM

## (ONE'S OWN CHOICE)

1972 / 125 mnts / BW / 35mm



### Festivals:

New York, Washington, Moscow, London, Paris, Nantes, La Rochelle, Pesaro, Helsinki, Ljubljana, Munich, Fribourg and Colombo among others.

### Awards:

Certificate of Merit – International Film Review, Colombo.

National awards for Best film, Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Actress. Kerala State awards for Best film made in Kerala, Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction.

### Director's statement

Swayamvaram is a trip from illusion to reality. A young man and a woman decide to live together and set out for a city with dreams of living together happily ever after. They have romantic ideas of a life cut away from the net work of their families. He is hopeful of finding a job, getting his first novel published; but the reality of the situation turns to be far from cordial. The spectrum of unemployment stares in their face. They leave the hotel they first landed to accommodate themselves in a dingy lodge room and eventually end up in a small old house on the outskirts of the town where the less privileged have their huts and tenements.

However underprivileged he is, the hero cannot see himself as one among the jobless who take out rallies in the street raising slogans against the Government in power. The clerical job in a saw mill that he lands in a desperate bid for survival is not without its problems. To start with, he has been put in place of someone who was dismissed from service. The man who lost the job starts haunting him but while the hero has all the sympathy for him he can't help it. This is in spite of a haunting feeling of guilt. It is a typical case of the moral crisis of the middle class.

### Credits:

- Direction: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**
- Produced by: **Chitrlekha Film Co-operative**
- Story & Script: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan** (Assisted by **K.P.Kumaran**)
- Cinematography: **Ravi Varma**
- Audiography : **P. Devadas** (Direct Sound)
- Editing: **A. Ramesan**
- Music: **M.B. Srinivasan**
- Art: **B.K. Sivasakthian Nair & B.D. Dathan**
- Editing: **M. Mani**
- Production Controller: **Kulathoor Bhas-karan Nair**
- Format : **35 mm B&W**

### Cast & Characters:

- **Madhu** (Viswanathan)
- **Sarada** (Sita)
- **Thikkurissi** (Principal, Tutorial)
- **Adoor Bhavani** (Neighbour)
- **Lalita** (Kalyani)
- **P.C. Soman** (Kalyani's husband)
- **B.K.Nair** (Accountant)
- **Gopi** (The dismissed employee)
- **P.K.Venukkuttan Nair** (Smuggler Vasu)
- **Somasekharan Nair** (Landlord)

# KODIYETTAM (ASCENT)

1977 / 128 mnts / 35 MM / BW



## Festivals:

New York, Washington, London, Paris, La Rochelle, Nantes, Berlin, Helsinki, Munich, Pesaro, Ljubljana, Fribourg, Valladolid, Adelaide and Tunis among others.

## Awards:

National Awards for the best Actor, Best Malayalam film.

Kerala State awards for the Best film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Art Direction.

## Director's statement

The film is given an episodic structure. It has been designed to give the viewer the feeling that no one has interfered with Shankarankutty's – the lead character's – slow and uneventful progression from a simpleton and a flotsam who doesn't count himself as one to be taken seriously to someone who mends his ways and becomes aware of his responsibilities deserving of his estranged wife's love and affection.

On close examination, it can be discerned that the film is structured like a temple festival in a village in Kerala. The film starts with three cannon shots being fired marking the symbolic beginning of the annual temple festival. The festival attracts practically everyone from and around the village and it becomes a conglomeration of humanity. Their being together is the crux of the festival.

It is after a long spell of separation that Shankarankutty and Santhamma find their love for each other with a child born to them. Matching with their union, the fireworks from the nearby temple explode in the sky. Santhamma's cry of happiness merges with the thunderous sounds of the festival's climax. The attributes of one has grown on the other.

## Credits:

- Story, Script, Dialogue & Direction: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**
- Production Company: **Chitralekha Film Co-operative**
- Image: **Ravi Varma**
- Sound: **Ramachandran & Adoor Gopalakrishnan**
- Editing: **M. Mani**
- Art Direction: **Sivan**
- Production Controller: **Kulathoor Bhaskaran Nair**
- Chief Assistant: **Meera Sahib**

## Cast & Characters:

- **Gopi** as Shankarankutty
- **Lalita** as Santhamma
- **Azeez** as truck driver
- **Kaviyoor Ponnammamma** as Kamalamma the widow
- **Vilasini** as Sankarankutty's sister
- **Adoor Bhavani** as Santhamma's mother
- **B.K. Nair** as the match-maker
- **Thikkurissy** as Sukumaran Pillai
- **P.K. Venukuttan Nair** as Police Constable
- **Vempayam Thampi** as the mahout
- **P.C. Soman** as the tea-shop owner

# ELIPPATHAYAM (RAT TRAP)

1981 / Colour / 121 mnts



## Festivals:

Cannes, Paris, La Rochelle, Nantes, Pesaro, Munich, Ljubljana, London, Valladolid, Washington DC, Chicago, Seattle, Houston, New York, Havana, Alexandria, Sao Paulo, Sydney and Melbourne among others.

## Awards:

British Film Institute Award for the 'Most Original and Imaginative film' of 1982.

National Awards for the Best Regional Film and Best Audiography.

Kerala State Awards for Best Film, Best Cinematography and Best Audiography.

## Director's statement

The film is about change, change that is painful but inevitable. The resistance to change is desperate when the victim is weak. Here, Unni senses dimly that to fight is futile and he seeks shelter under self-love.

In this film I have tried to take a look at the interior of an attitude, a state of mind.

The story is so structured as to unfold in a series of departures — from a condition of entrapment to liberation. The first three are of the rats and the other three, different from one another, are of the human inmates of the old house.

I have given the film a very simple exterior for I want the audience to enter, without hesitation, into it.

I always work from my own idea and script. This allows me a lot of freedom but takes up a lot of time.

Of the three films I have made to date 'Elippathayam' is the one closest to me. It is not only because the film, set in a remote village in Kerala, reflects faithfully my own economic and social background but also the characters portrayed here are modeled after those I have known intimately.

## Credits:

- Story, Script & Direction : **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**
- Production Company: **General Pictures**
- Producer: **Ravi**
- Executive Producer: **T. C. Shankar**
- Camera: **Ravi Varma**
- Sound: **Devadas**
- Music: **M.B. Srinivasan**
- Editing: **M. Mani**
- Art: **Sivan**
- Chief Assistant: **Meera Sahib**

## Cast & Characters:

- **Karamana** as Unni
- **Sarada** as Rajamma, Unni's younger sister
- **Jalaja** as Sridevi, the youngest sister
- **Rajam K. Nair** as Janamma, the elder sister
- **Prakash** as Janamma's son
- **Somasekharan Nair** as Estate manager
- **John Samuel** as Estate manager's son
- **B. K. Nair** as The match-maker
- **Joycee** as The low-caste woman
- **Thampi** as A neighbour
- **B. Nair** as The Court notice server

# ANANTARAM (MONOLOGUE)

1987 / Colour / 125 mnts



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## Festivals:

Venice, Pesaro, Karlovy Vary, La Rochelle, Nantes, Amiens, Riga, Munich, Bribourge, Ljubljana, Helsinki, London, Washington DC, New York, San Francisco, Toronto, Hawaii and Alexandria among others.

## Awards:

International Film Critics Prize (FIPRESCI) for the Best film, Karlovy Vary Film Festival.

National Awards: for Best Director, Best Screenplay, and Best Audiography.

Kerala State Award for Best Director.

## Director's statement

Anantaram, at one level is a film about story telling or rather about the very process of artistic creation.

Ajayan the protagonist is on the verge of a nervous break-down. Through the stories that he narrates, he is trying to reveal and justify how he reached this stage. No rational explanation can in fact give a complete and final answer. He is drawing up on the experiences from his life basically from two stand-points – that of an introvert and an extrovert, the two positions we all keep shifting from time to time. The first story is about Ajayan the extrovert. A mediocre world around him keeps stifling him as he is too brilliant for it to contain. He withdraws and gets pushed to seclusion and mental strain. The second story is about Ajayan the introvert. Having been relegated to neglect and loneliness, he grows up in the midst of three old servants who are alternatively caring and scaring the little boy. His sensitivity and imagination take him to a world of active fantasy and an inability to grasp reality. Lies become real and the real turns lies for him.

## Credits:

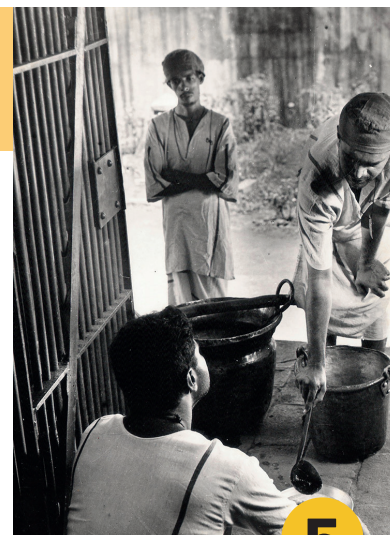
- Story, Script & Direction: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**
- Producer : **Ravi**
- Photography : **Ravi Varma**
- Audiography : **Devadas, Krishnanunni&Harikumar**
- Editing : **M. Mani**
- Music : **M.B. Srinivasan**
- Art Direction : **Sivan**
- Associate Director : **Meera**
- Chief Assistant : **M.P. Sukumarannait**
- Production Controller : **Rajasekharan Nair**
- Production Company : **General Pictures**

## Cast & Characters:

- **Ashokan** (Ajayan Sudheesh-Ajayan-boy)
- **Sooraj** (Ajayan-child)
- **Mammootty** (Doctor Balu)
- **Shobhanz** (Suma, Balu's wife & Nalini)
- **N.B. Thampi** (Doctor – Uncle)
- **B.K. Nair** (Compounder)
- **Vempayam** (Cook)
- **Bahadur** (Driver)
- **Chandran Nair** (Teacher)
- **C.R. Ajayakumar** (Ajayan's hostel mate)

# MATHILUKAL (THE WALLS)

1990 / Colour / 117 mnts



## Festivals:

Venice, Pusan, Milan, Nantes, Manosque, Amiens, Munich, Fribourg, Rotterdam, Vienna, London, Ljubljana, Toronto, Los Angeles, Washington, New York, Hawaii, Istanbul and Haifa among others.

## Awards:

International Film Critics Prize (FIPRESCI) Venice, UNICEF Film Prize Venice, Ecumenical Film Prize Amiens, Best Film and Best Director Auberville film festival for Youth. National Awards for Best Director, Best Actor, Best Sound and Best Malayalam film. Kerala State Award for Best Story

## Director's statement

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer is a favourite writer of mine. He is perhaps the most original author in Malayalam, my mother-tongue. Sometime early '88, I re-read his autobiographical novelette, Mathilukal, after a long time, and found it just as gripping.

The idea of giving shape to a complex character only through the voice, and of developing an intense relationship between two people separated by a wall, was simply fascinating. Having decided to adapt the story I went about it as if I were making a film based on one of my own original ideas. I took the liberty to introduce my own characters and incidents, cut out some of the author's, and borrowed a few from other of his prison stories. All along, my effort has been to make a film faithful to Basheer and yet one that has a life of its own. In this process, the narrator in the story became Basheer himself and the film evolved as much as a piece about Basheer as one based on his story.

The result, I believe, is an exploration into the creative mind of a writer and a great humanist. At another level, it is a film about freedom. It asks the fundamental question of what freedom really means.

## Credits:

- Script, Dialogue & Direction: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**
- Story: **Vaikom Muhammad Basheer**
- Photography: **Ravi Varma**
- Audiography: **Hari Kumar**
- Editing: **M. Mani**
- Music: **Vijaya Bhaskar**
- Art Direction & Costumes: **Sivan**
- Make-up: **P.N. Mani**
- Chief Assistant: **Meera Sahib**
- Production Controller: **MP. Sukumaran Nair**
- Production Company: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan Productions**
- Stills: **Mohan, Nana**
- Sponsor: **Doordarshan, India**

## Cast & Characters:

- **Mammootty** (Basheer)
- **Thilakan** (head warder)
- **Murali** (Basheer's classmate)
- **Ravi Vallathol** (Razak)
- **Karamana** (political leader)
- **Sreenath** (jailor)
- **Babu Namboodiri** (trade union leader)
- **Jagannatha Varma** (judge)
- **Vempayam** (habitual criminal)

# VIDHEYAN (THE SERVILE)

1993 / Colour / 112 mnts



## Festivals:

London, Pesaro, Nantes, Brussels, San Francisco, Fribourg, Munich, Mannheim, Rotterdam, Ljubljana, Singapore, Hongkong, Fukuoka, Brisbane, Durban, Tehran, Toronto, New York, Chicago, Hawaii and Sao Paulo among others.

## Awards:

International Film Critics Prize, Singapore. INTER FILM Prize, Mannheim National Awards for Best Actor and Best Malayalam film. Kerala State awards for Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Story, Special award for M.R.Gopakumar (Acting).

## Director's statement

The film tells a parable-like story. Whereas it is true to recent history, and can very well stand up as an authentic social document on the life and times of the Keralite immigrants in the feudal setting of a neighbouring State, the concerns of the film go beyond mere realistic portrayal.

I have used the plot of the story to explore the subterranean landscape of the human mind. Here, terror – the oppressive form of power – joins hands with servility in a pathological alliance of interdependence. Each of them, oppressor and oppressed, is the source of sustenance of the other. Vidheyan is a study of the psychology and structure of power – as also an attempt to examine what lies buried beneath an obsessive servility.

## Credits:

- Script, Dialogue & Direction: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**
- Production Company: **General Pictures**
- Add: Chief Assistant: **Meera Sahib**
- Make-up: **P.N. Mani**
- Stills: **Rajasekharan**
- Producer: **Ravi**
- Camera : **Ravi Varma**
- Sound : **Devadas & Krishnanunni**
- Editing: **M. Mani**
- Décor: **Sivan**
- Music : **Vijaya Bhaskar**

## Cast & Characters:

- **Mammooty** (as BhaskaraPatelar )
- **Gopakumar** (as Thommi )
- **Tanvi Asmi** (as Sarojakka, Patelar's wife )
- **Sabita Anand** (as Thommi's wife )
- **Ravi Vallathol** (as Patelar's nephew)
- **Soman, Aliyar, M.K.Gopalakrishnan** (as Patelar's aides )
- **Azees** (as Sarojakka's brother)
- **Appachan** (as vicar )
- **Mavelikkara Ramachandran**(as villager )
- **S.S.Nair** (as a settler)
- **P.V. Thampi** (as helper in the toddy shop )
- **Sarojini Shetty** (as the accused woman )

## Koodiyattam: The Rich Ancient Dying Art

180 min / 2001 / with English subtitles

Director: Adoor Gopalakrishnan

Documentary film on Koodiyattam, a performance art that draws on the plays of Sanskrit dramatists of antiquity that is believed to have followed an unbroken tradition for more than 1,000 years in the state of Kerala. The renowned filmmaker, Adoor Gopalakrishnan was invited to direct this documentary for preparing the candidature file for UNESCO's international distinction, "Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity". The film was shot at the 16th century temple theatre at Kidangoor, the oldest of the surviving kuttampalam, a theatre within a temple compound where koodiyattam is traditionally presented.



## Images/ Reflections

Documentary on Adoor 2015 / Colour / 88 min

Director: **Girish Kasaravalli.**

Produced by **Films Division of India**

Cinematography : **Sunny Joseph**

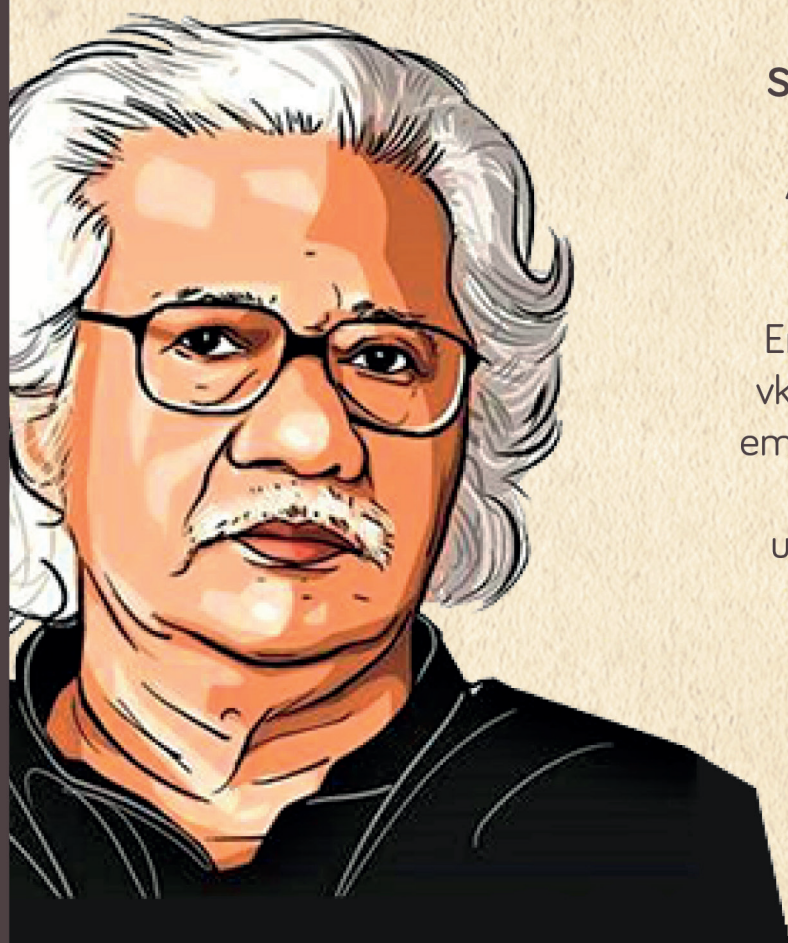
Edited by **Mohan Kamakshi**

The documentary portrays Adoor Gopalakrishnan's journey as a film director. The film begins with an evening scene depicting Gopalakrishnan lighting an oil lamp. A large portion of the documentary contains conversations/questions-answers between Kasaravalli and Gopalakrishnan. The career and works of Gopalakrishnan is divided into five parts ("chapters"): *Kathapurushan* (The man of the story), *Mukhamukham* (Face to face), Adoor Gopalakrishnan as seen by *Naalu Pennungal* (Four Women), *Swayamvaram* (Making one's own choices), and *Anantharam* (An Epilogue).



# Swayamvaram@50

## CREATIVE WORLD OF **ADOOR GOPALAKRISHNAN**



**Swayamvaram50**, the You Tube channel has a 20/25 minute video series with Adoor speaking on each of his films, his inspirations, concerns and issues which he raised through them. The series in English by **V K Cherian**, film writer, ([www.vkcherian.in](http://www.vkcherian.in)) and in Malayalam hosted by eminent cultural activist **K N Shaji** will help all those interested in meaningful films, understand Adoor as a film maker and a maestro better.

**An excerpt of the interview pertaining to the film being screened will be shown before the movie starts.**

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