

# India Now!

Centuries ago, the proxy for one of India's earthly conquerors watched a caravan of elephants laden with gold, precious gems and sumptuous cloth wend its way west. He wrote to his master: "Sire, this land is rich beyond the dreams of avarice."

Today India is no longer the place of enigma and mystery this tale conjures up – after all, people of Indian descent make up an essential part of our community – but the great wealth, now perhaps more cultural than mineral, it alludes to has never been more certain.

Literally hundreds of films are produced and released every year in India. They are made in a variety of languages, so that some films are seen only in the area where a particular language is spoken. Others, the most popular, are dubbed. Others still – the "uncommercial, art" films – are seen within the rather narrow confines of festivals and cultural centres. And, while it is tempting to remember Kapoor, Ray and that fabulous trove of mythologicals and musicals, we have disciplined ourselves, opting instead for a portrait of Indian cinema now. We decided, of course, to choose the very best films we could find and now immodestly believe that the programme gives a very clear idea of what is happening in Indian film today.

One of the absolute requisites in our minds was to include popular films, which have been undeservedly dismissed by so many. The self-styled Indian "cultural elite" has long refused to take these films seriously, even as they praised American and European art cinema. Yet popular musicals contain more energy, more vital creativity, and, oddly, allow more freedom of the creative imagination than the most "artistic" of the cinema d'auteur. These films are long and include everything – romance, adventure, tragedy, comedy, and always those hallucinatory songs and dances, which are sometimes used to further the plot and just as often simply there to delight. There may be no message (thank God!), but they move, they entertain, and they are finally why we all fell in love with movies in the first place. Mani Rathnam – several of whose films appear in a special section – is, to our minds, the master of the modern popular musical. If his magical films don't delight you, perhaps you are beyond delight.

When Satyajit Ray's classic *Pathar Panchali* screened at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, it revealed an India rarely seen before and demonstrated the possibilities of another kind of cinema. India's rich tradition of art cinema has flourished ever since, often drawing – like the popular films – on music and dance for their inspiration. A good deal of this programme is made up of "serious" films which tell Indian stories about ordinary people living their lives. Often based on literary sources rarely circulated here, the films are set in the villages and in the cities. They remain basically and authentically Indian, but touch universal themes found in important world cinema.

After independence, documentary film in India was dominated by Films Division, the Indian equivalent of the National Film Board of Canada. Long compromised by real and imagined "third-world aesthetics" and political interference, Films Division has gradually lost its influence. But it is only over the last few years that young directors, with diverse backgrounds and varying agendas, have created a truly independent documentary scene. Some have examined the cultural past – many seem fascinated by the working of the cinema itself – and others have looked with a none-too-kindly eye at politics and society.

So, then, here is India now as mirrored in thousands of images created by the finest film artists now working. Here is the proof that India is indeed a land of riches beyond the dreams of avarice.

– David Overbey, Noah Cowan

*This programme would have been impossible without the support of several people. In Toronto, Dr. Atul Tolia has done outstanding work promoting this Festival corporately and within the community. In India, we received essential assistance from Ms. Uma da Cunha, Mr. S. Narayanan of the National Film Development Corporation, Ms. Malti Sahai and Mr. Sunit Tandon of the Directorate of Film Festivals and Ms. Riva Vaidya and Mr. Riyad Wadia and their families. Thank you.*

Sponsored by



# India Now!

## OPENING NIGHT



## Bandit Queen

**Shekhar Kapur**

INDIA, 1994

119 minutes ■ Colour/35mm (Hindi)  
 Production Company: **Film Four International/Kaleidoscope**  
 Producer: **Sundeep S. Bedi**  
 Screenplay: **Mala Sen**  
 Cinematography: **Ashok Mehta**  
 Editor: **Renu Saluja**  
 Art Director: **Ashok Bhagat**  
 Sound: **Robert Taylor, Tom Lewiston**  
 Music: **Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan**  
 Principal Cast: **Seema Biswas, Nirmal Pandey, Manoj Bajpai, Rajesh Vivek, Raghuvir Yadav, Govind Namdeo, Saurabh Shukla**  
 Print Source: **Alliance Releasing, 920 Yonge Street, Suite 400, Toronto, Ontario M4W 3C7, Canada.**  
 Tel: (416) 967-1174.  
 Fax: (416) 967-4358.  
 Foreign Sales Agent: **Film Four International, 124 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2TX, UK.**  
 Tel: (44-71) 396-4444.  
 Fax: (44-71) 306-8361.

Phoolan Devi, India's most famous outlaw, is still a controversial figure. Named Goddess of Flowers, the Bandit Queen was accused of murder and kidnapping, including slaughtering 30 men in a raid dubbed the Behmai Massacre, an event that brought down an entire government. When she surrendered in 1983, it was on her own terms, before a crowd of 10,000 cheering fans, who thought of her as an avenging angel, the scourge of the rich and protector of the common man. Shekar Kapur's film is based partly on her autobiography, a version of her life that she has now disowned. Seeking to read behind her words, Kapur and writer Mala Sen have tried to see where she was overly self-serving or under romantic illusion (as with her treatment of her lover). The filmmakers are sympathetic, however, and never attempt to mitigate the circumstances which drove Devi to violence. The screen re-creation of the gang rape, for example, is so harrowing that one can begin to imagine her pain and thirst for rightful vengeance. To emphasize the social ramifications of Devi's plight, Kapur contrasts her barren world, with its waterless deserts and scrub-covered hills, against the luxury of those who plotted against her. All of the political implications and the social circumstances that led to both the hatred and idolatry are rooted solidly in the film but, first and foremost, Kapur has made a rip-snorting action thriller that will please even those who don't give a damn about India's problems. Phoolan Devi, by

the way, was released in February 1994 by special order of the Indian Supreme Court, 12 years after her surrender. Now treated as a superstar, she plans to go into politics.

— *David Overbey*

**Shekhar Kapur** was born in 1945. At the age of 25, working in London as a chartered accountant, he decided to change his life. Returning to India, he became an actor and later he directed his first film, *Masoom (Innocent)*, about a child caught up in middle class hypocrisy. It was a critical and commercial hit. He went on to direct more films, the most notable being *Mr. India*, now considered a classic. Kapur continues to alternate acting with directing. Films include: *Masoom* (83), *Mr. India* (87), *Bandit Queen* (94).

Sponsored by





## Patang

### The Kite

**Goutam Ghose**

INDIA, 1993

100 minutes ■ Colour/35mm (Hindi)  
Production Company: **G.N.S. Motion Pictures Pvt. Ltd.**

Producer: **Durba Sahay, Sanjay Sahay**

Screenplay: **Goutam Ghose, Ain Rashid Khan, based on a story by Sanjay Sahay**

Cinematography: **Goutam Ghose**  
Editor: **Moloy Banerjee**

Art Director: **Ashoke Bose**

Sound: **Robin Sengupta, Anup Mukherjee**

Music: **Goutam Ghose**

Principal Cast: **Shabana Azmi, Om Puri, Shatrughan Sinha, Sayed Shafique, Robi Ghosh, Mohan Aagashe, Ashad Sinha**

Print Source: **Directorate of Film Festivals, 4th Floor, Lok Nayak Bhawan, Khan Market, New Delhi 110003, India. Tel: (91-11) 469-4920. Fax: (91-11) 462-3430**

Foreign Sales Agent: **G.N.S. Motion Pictures Pvt. Ltd., A.P. Colony, Gaya, Bihar, India. Tel: (91-631) 20693. Fax: (91-631) 440-4425.**

The uniquely talented actress Shabana Azmi is the engine that drives Goutam Ghose's impressive new film, *The Kite*.

Azmi is Jitni, a widow living in the dusty railway village of Manpur with her teenage son, Somra (Shatrughan Sinha of *Salaam Bombay!* fame). While Jitni has a scandalous affair with the local bandit (Om Puri) – his gang loots the trains as they slow down to cross a nearby bridge – her son dreams of better things as he flies his favourite kites above the heath. Then an eager, idealistic, railway police inspector comes to town, just as the bandit lures Somra into his organization, and Jitni's perilous emotional life is suddenly thrown out of kilter.

Ghose is one of India's most visually accomplished young directors. His early career as a cinematographer and documentary maker was notable for powerful and moving images. Last year's Festival entry, *Boatman of the River Padma*, confirmed his ability with the camera and revealed a newfound talent as a more philosophically-inclined storyteller. *The Kite* is also a departure, but for different reasons. Unafraid of commercial conventions, it seamlessly integrates strands of comedy and melodrama into its strong underlying social message.

But *The Kite* is finally a moving, life-affirming film about ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary situations. It is Ghose's ability as a filmmaker, coupled with Azmi's warm, authoritative performance – the muse of Mrinal Sen for many

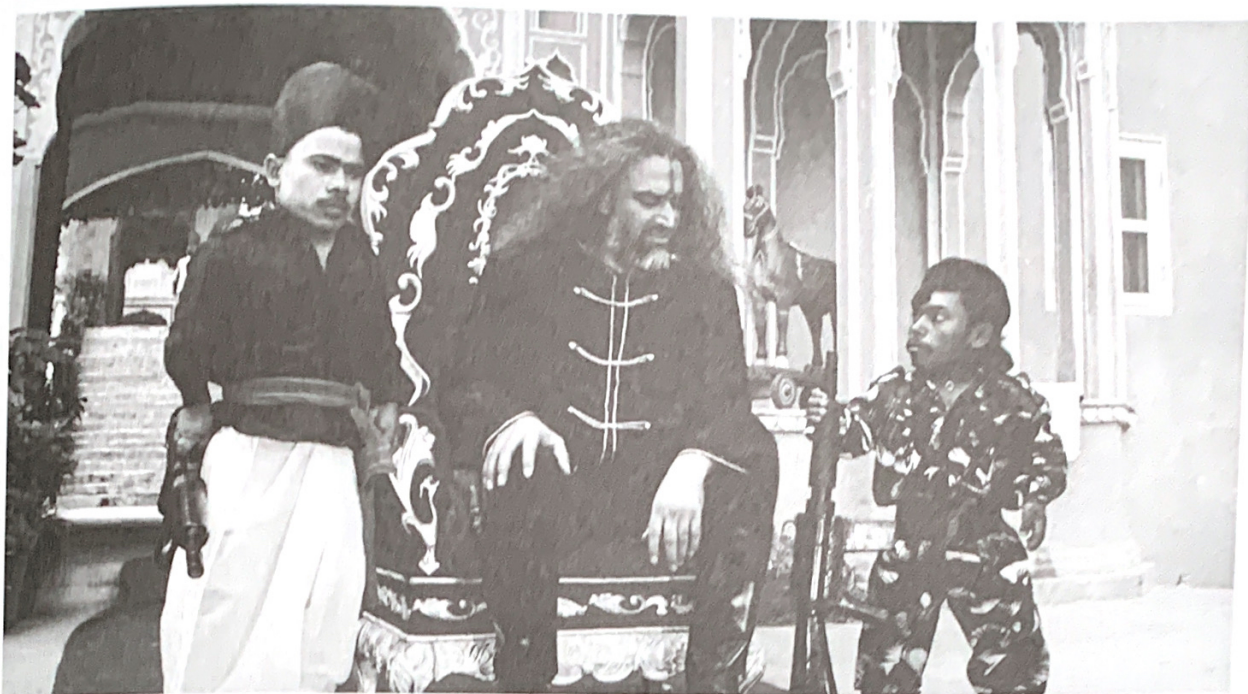
years, Azmi is certainly India's best-known actress in the West – that makes the events overtaking these people seem all the more real.

– *Noah Cowan*

**Goutam Ghose**, born in 1950, was brought up in Calcutta. After graduating from the University of Calcutta, he began a career in theatre, working occasionally as a journalist and photographer. In 1973, he began making documentaries: *Hungry Autumn* (74) won accolades at the Oberhausen Film Festival, while *Land of the Sand Dunes* (86) won a national award as Best Documentary. Other documentaries include: *New Earth* (73), *Chains of Bondage* (74), *Meeting a Milestone* (89). Feature films include: *Maa Bhoomi* (79), *Dakhal* (82), *Paar* (84), *Antarjali Yatra* (87), *Boatman of the River Padma* (92), *The Kite* (93).

Sponsored by





## Bollywood

### Bikramjit "Blondie" Singh

INDIA, 1994

120 minutes ■ Colour/35mm  
Production Company: **Soni-Kahn**

#### Production

Executive Producer: **John Tu, David Sun, Vimal Soni**

Producer: **Bikramjit "Blondie" Singh**

Screenplay: **Bikramjit "Blondie" Singh**, based on **Shashi Tharoor's** novel "Show Business"

Cinematography: **Jayvant Pathare**

Art Director: **Bikramjit "Blondie" Singh**

Music: **Tushar Parte**

Principal Cast: **Chunky Panday, Veena Bidasha, Saeed Jaffrey, Mukesh Rishi, Meera Varma, Tariq Yunus, Dipti Naval, Blondie Singh, Akash, Nilish Malhotra**

Print Source: **Soni-Kahn Productions, 4000 Barranca Parkway, Suite 150, Irvine, California 92714, USA.**

Tel: (714) 559-8936.

Fax: (714) 559-0914.

Foreign Sales Agent: **Soni-Kahn Productions, 4000 Barranca Parkway, Suite 150, Irvine, California 92714, USA.**

Tel: (714) 559-8936.

Fax: (714) 559-0914.

*Bollywood* is a huge (a cast of thousands!), splashy, boisterous (30-songs), and wildly wicked satire of the biggest movie industry in the world. Its hero (anti-hero?) Ashok starts as a serious actor, but gives up Little Theatre productions of Pinter in English (and the good girl who went with them) to make it in the movies. Soon he is a huge star, turning out trash which he himself can't remember even as he's making it. Included, of course, are digest-versions of the many sorts of commercial Bombay talkies. This, we must remember, is India – where politics and show business are closely connected (unlike anywhere else in the world).

Ashok is the son of an honest (!) politician who encourages his son to run for office. Scandal follows. The film is chock full of characters who would be unbelievable if they weren't drawn directly from life: the sexually voracious gossip columnist; aging stars who would kill to play one more romantic lead; the director who doesn't know one end of a camera from the other but who's the son of the studio head. The list is endlessly rich. It's all great fun – fun of the malicious kind.

The film is based on "Show Business," Shashi Tharoor's wonderful novel, which becomes all the more powerful here because it satirizes its own medium. Bikramjit "Blondie" Singh knows all about the business: he has turned out hundreds of films from B-actioners to porn and all the small exploitation films made for a dime and sold for a dollar.

He himself says he has no truck with "intellectual cinema" and that he wants only to entertain. But that too may be part of the *Bollywood* game, since there are thought-provoking barbs in every one of the jokes and the impossible musical numbers.

– *David Overbey*

**Bikramjit "Blondie" Singh** was born in Calcutta, India. In the late sixties, he went to London and studied history at Cambridge University. He later moved to the United States to continue his studies, first in photography at the New England School in Boston and the Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, then in film at the San Francisco Art Institute. During the early eighties, he worked as a freelance photographer. From 1982 to 1992, in India's Bollywood, he was a writer, director and producer of such Hindi feature films as *Mr. Natralal* and *Ram Val Ram*. *Bollywood* (94) is his first English-language feature film.

Sponsored by





## Thevar Magan

### Bharathan

INDIA, 1992

145 minutes ■ Colour/35mm (Tamil)

Production Company: **Raajkamal**

**Films International**

Producer: **Kamal Haasan**

Screenplay: **Kamal Haasan**

Cinematography: **P.C. Sriram**

Editor: **N.P. Satish**

Art Director: **Ashok**

Music: **Ilayaraja**

Choreography: **Raghuram**

Lyrics: **Vaalee**

Principal Cast: **Kamal Haasan,**

**Gowthami, Shivaji Ganesan,**

**Revathy Menon, Nazar,**

**Kakaradhakrishnan, Vijai, S.N.**

**Lakshmi, Prasanthi**

Print Source: **Raajkamal Films**

**International, 218 T.T.K. Road,**

**Alwarpet, Madras 600018, India.**

Tel: (91-44) 451-199.

Fax: (91-44) 459-939.

Foreign Sales Agent: **Raajkamal Films**

**International, 218 T.T.K. Road,**

**Alwarpet, Madras 600018, India.**

Tel: (91-44) 451-199.

Fax: (91-44) 459-939.

Kamal Haasan is probably the biggest movie star – and one of the finest actors – in Indian cinema. At four he was a child star, and has since been in 150 films. His native language is Tamil, but he can act in Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, Kanada and English. He has acted in the theatre and is a well-known interpreter of Carnatic music. His stories and poems appear widely in Tamil publications and he has won every possible award in India. As well, he has insisted that his fan clubs dissolve into a social welfare organization that sets up medical camps for tribal people, among other activities.

One focuses here on Haasan because he is the source and driving force behind *Thevar Magan*. His screenplay for the film is difficult to summarize, since it is an absolute cornucopia of events and characters. Briefly – and inadequately – *Thevar* has a number of sons. The eldest is an alcoholic troublemaker who returns from his London education and immediately scandalizes the village by bringing along a girlfriend. His younger brother is not much more traditional, and marries a non-Tamil girl before starting a fast-food outlet in the city.

The rest of the film involves sacrilege, robbery, explosions, redemption, feuds, marriages and false marriages, attempted murder, religious festivals and, of course, many vibrant song-and-dance numbers. There is something for everyone in this extraordinary film. *Thevar Magan* is an example of Indian popular cinema at its best.

– David Overbey

**Bharathan** is a well-known director of Tamil cinema in India. *Thevar Magan* (92) was the National Award winner for Best Tamil Film in 1993.

**Kamal Haasan** is a multi-talented actor, singer, dancer, choreographer, writer, assistant director and producer. He has some 150 Tamil films to his credit. He scripted and produced *Thevar Magan* (92) and also appears in it as an actor and singer.

Sponsored by





## English, August

### Dev Benegal

INDIA, 1994

118 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Tropicfilm**

Producer: **Dev Benegal**

Screenplay: **Upamanyu Chatterjee, Dev Benegal, based on Chatterjee's novel "English, August"**

Cinematography: **Anoop Jotwani, Mohanan K.U.**

Editor: **Dev Benegal**

Art Director: **Anuradha Parikh-Benegal**

Sound: **Vikram Joglekar**

Music: **Vikram Joglekar, D. Wood**

Principal Cast: **Rahul Bose, Salim Shah, Shivaji Satham, Veerendra Saxena, Yogendra Tikku, Vivek Shah, Tanvi Azmi, Mita Vashisht, Shivraj**

Print Source: **Tropicfilm, #10-28/29 Janki-Kutir, Juhu Road, Bombay 400049, India. Tel: (91-22) 615-0962. Fax: (91-22) 610-4840.**

Foreign Sales Agent: **Tropicfilm, #10-28/29 Janki-Kutir, Juhu Road, Bombay 400049, India. Tel: (91-22) 615-0962. Fax: (91-22) 610-4840.**

The subject is India – modern India, where the urban and well-to-do speak English, read English and American books, see American and French films, eschew local movies, and know more about American than Indian music. Agastya (called "English, August" for obvious reasons) Sen speaks and thinks in English. A lover of poetry, he listens to Bob Dylan, rock and jazz and reads Marcus Aurelius for pleasure. He is also an Administrative Service Officer, a member of the most influential and powerful cadre of civil servants in the country. His class, family and education indicate he will be part of modern India's governing elite.

The very-English August is sent off for a year's training to Madna, an obscure small town in the backwaters. Culture shock in his own country follows. He feels like a foreigner, but must survive. He spends, therefore, a lot of his time daydreaming, fantasizing and masturbating. The film, obviously, is a comedy. August is surrounded by wild characters: Srivastava, the pompous head bureaucrat and his wife Malti, the fashion and cultural leader of the town; Sathe, a local pothead and cartoonist; Kumar, the Superintendent of Police and connoisseur of porn films; and Frog-to, the world's worst cook.

August is also surrounded by India as it is. The film was shot on location in Narsipatnam, Bhimunipatnam, and Vishakhapatnam – none on the tourist route – and Benegal has made the details of each place a major

part of his fast-paced film. Like the remarkable novel on which it is based, the film is subtle, moving and profound in its observation of human foibles and understanding of disaffection with one's own culture – particularly Indian, but far from unknown everywhere else.

– *David Overbey*

**Dev Benegal** was born in 1960 in Delhi. He studied film at New York University. Since 1985, he has worked primarily in documentaries. *English, August* (94) is his first feature film.

Sponsored by





## Shilpi

### The Dreamer

Nabyendu Chatterjee

INDIA, 1993

103 minutes ■ Colour/35mm (Bengali)

Production Company: **Government of West Bengal/National Film Development Corporation**

Screenplay: **Nabyendu Chatterjee, based on a story by Manik Bandopadhaya**

Cinematography: **Sakti Bandopadhaya**  
Editor: **Nemai Roy**

Art Director: **Radharaman Tapadar**

Sound: **Anup Mukhopadhaya**

Music: **Nikhil Chattopadhaya**

Principal Cast: **Anjan Dutt, Rwita Dutta Chakraborty, Sreelekha Mukherjee, Reba Roy Chowdhury, Asit Bandopadhaya**

Print Source: **Directorate of Film Festivals, 4th Floor, Lok Nayak Bhawan, Khan Market, New Delhi 110003, India. Tel: (91-11) 469-4920. Fax: (91-11) 462-3430.**

Foreign Sales Agent: **National Film Development Corporation, Nehru Centre, Worli, Bombay 400018, India. Tel: (91-22) 494-9856. Fax: (91-22) 495-0591.**

Respected by all for his artistry, Madan is considered the genius of weaving in his village in Bengal. He counts zamindars and rich families among his clients, supplying them with beautiful and costly saris, and, once a year, for the Puja celebrations, he has the honour of weaving the apparel for Lord Viswakarma's effigy.

But during the Second World War, hoarders and black marketeers cause artificial shortages, driving up yarn prices and thus force most weavers to use second-grade goods. A whole day's labour with this coarse yarn fails to provide one full meal a day for any family.

Madan, the idol of other artisans, refuses to work with lesser materials and the rest of the weavers follow suit. Starvation is soon widespread in the village – a fistful of rice is beyond the reach of many during the Bengal Famine – and even Madan's family begs him to compromise, particularly since his wife is in the last stages of pregnancy.

Finally, Madan manages to get one-sari's-worth of quality yarn from a merchant who hopes to break the will of the other workers. Late in the night, the villagers are startled awake by the unexpected clatter of Madan's loom – has the idealist fallen? – but what they discover is not what they expect.

At first glance, Nabyendu Chatterjee's film seems to be about economic repression. It is, on one level, but the central issue concerns an artist refusing to compromise his work and soul for material gain. Weaving

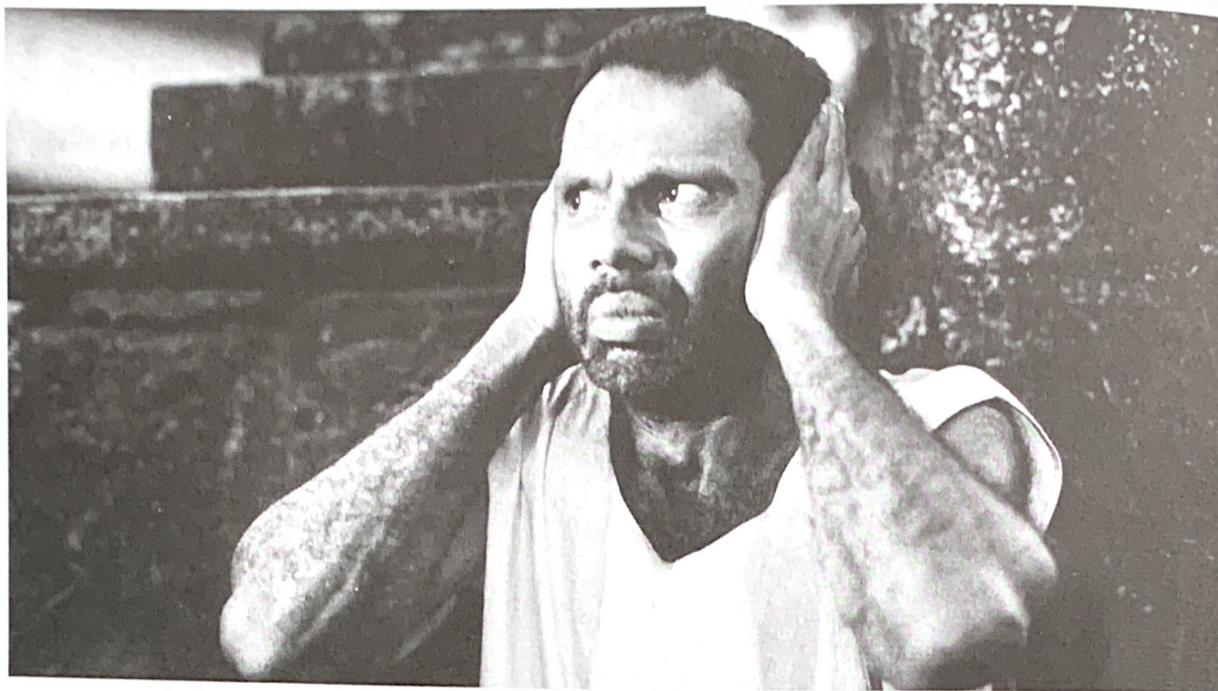
wonderful saris is Madan's life. He is most alive and most at peace working at the loom. The film questions how far an artist must go to remain true to himself and still fulfil his moral obligations. In addition to the fine portrait it presents of the artist as weaver and social rebel, Chatterjee's film is a carefully observed representation of village life and mores. Nabyendu Chatterjee here weaves a tapestry as rich as any of Madan's magical saris.

– *David Overbey*

**Nabyendu Chatterjee** made his directorial debut in 1967 with *Naya Raasta* in Hindi, and he continued his career with films in Bengali. He has alternated fiction films with documentaries and has won most of the major Indian film prizes. Films include: *Chithi* (73), *Aaj Kaal Parshur Galpa* (81), *Chopper* (85), *The Avenger* (89), *Born Within* (90), *The Dreamer* (93).

Sponsored by





## The Servile

### Vidheyam

**Adoor Gopalakrishnan**

INDIA, 1993

112 minutes ■ Colour/35mm  
(Malayalam)

Production Company: **General Pictures**

Producer: **K. Ravindran Nair**

Screenplay: **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**,  
based on a story by **Paul Zachariah**

Cinematography: **Ravi Varma**

Editor: **M. Mani**

Art Director: **Sivan**

Sound: **Devadas, Krishnaunni**

Music: **Vijay Bhaskar**

Principal Cast: **Mamooty,**  
**Gopakumar, Tanvi Azmi, Sabita Anand**

Print Source: **Directorate of Film Festivals, 4th Floor, Lok Nayak Bhawan, Khan Market, New Delhi 110003, India. Tel: (91-11) 469-4920. Fax: (91-11) 462-3430.**

Foreign Sales Agent: **General Pictures, Quilon 691001, Kerala, India. Tel: (91-474) 75278. Fax: (91-474) 78285.**

The elegance, humanity and intellectual rigour of Adoor Gopalakrishnan's work has made him one of the most revered of Indian filmmakers and a favourite of critics the world over. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Gopalakrishnan's films also play in front of large audiences all over his home state of Kerala, a far cry from the rest of India where "art" cinema is confined to one or two theatres in large cities.

His newest film, *The Servile*, continues the themes implicit in *The Walls*, his saga of an unjustly imprisoned writer which screened at the 1990 Festival. But while *The Walls* posited a freedom that transcends mere physical captivity, *The Servile* deals with a brutal slavery that consumes mind as well as body.

Tommi is a simple migrant farmer eking out an existence with his wife on arid land. Life is hard but tolerable until Tommi is accosted in the village by Bhaskara Patelar, the degenerate and greatly feared landlord of the region. For sport, Patelar decides to terrorize Tommi: beatings, verbal humiliation and the rape of his wife, Omana, follow. While Tommi wishes to strike back, he knows the consequences of crossing such a tyrant. As the abuse continues, however, Tommi finds himself drawn to the evil man. He joins his household staff and becomes an accomplice, helping the master execute his loathsome and profane schemes. But when Patelar kills his wife and botches the cover-up, Tommi's allegiance is severely tested.

With its thickly-drawn narrative lines and characters, *The Servile* can serve as a grand metaphor for any modern power relationship. But the poetry of the film is perhaps found elsewhere: in Mamooty's subtle, modulated performance as the evil Patelar; in the harsh but frequently breathtaking Karnataka landscapes; and, of course, in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's masterful ability to distil an intriguing, accessible tale from a morally complex subject.

— *Noah Cowan*

**Adoor Gopalakrishnan** was born in 1941. He graduated from the Film and Television Institute at Pune in 1965. Subsequently, he brought the Film Society movement, begun by Satyajit Ray, to Kerala and formed a film co-operative. He has won the National Award for Best Direction four times and has received prizes from the British Film Institute, UNICEF, OCIC and FIPRESCI juries in Venice, New Delhi, Karlovy Vary and, this year, in Calcutta. His films include: *Swayamvaram* (72), *Kodiyattam* (77), *Elippathyam* (81), *Mukhamukham* (84), *Eau/Ganga* (85), *Anantaram* (87), *The Walls* (90), *The Servile* (93).

Sponsored by

**NORTHLAND**  
**CLEAN-BURN**  
TECHNOLOGY  
CONROS CORPORATION





## Ilayum Mullum

### Leaves and Thorns

**K.P. Sasi**

INDIA, 1993

91 minutes ■ Colour/35mm  
(Malayalam)

Production Company: **ALCOM**  
(Alternate Communication Forum)

Screenplay: **K.P. Sasi, P. Baburaj,**  
**Satheesh Poduval**

Cinematography: **Venkitaramani**

Editor: **K.P. Sasi**

Sound: **Krishna Kumar, Raj Mohan,**  
**Shammi Thilakan**

Music: **Ramesh Narayanan**

Principal Cast: **Pallavi Joshi, Santhi**  
**Krishna, Kanya, Sabanam**

Print Source: **Directorate of Film**  
**Festivals, 4th Floor, Lok Nayak**  
**Bhawan, Khan Market, New Delhi**  
**110003, India. Tel: (91-11) 469-4920.**  
**Fax: (91-11) 462-3430.**

Foreign Sales Agent: **ALCOM, A-11,**  
**Green Park Extension, New Delhi**  
**110016, India. Fax: (91-11) 685-2299.**

The subject is the repression of women. Before one reacts by rejecting yet one more film on this subject from yet one more director of the "developing world," let it be known that this film is different. First, the tale takes place in Kerala, a region renowned for centuries as enlightened and progressive and where women have the right to education. So if this is Kerala, what is the rest of the nation like? Then, *Leaves and Thorns* places its characters in a clearly defined and physically wonderful environment, and makes sure we understand how the village works and what the relationships are between all the people.

Beginning with character, Sasi demonstrates how circumstances are formed by character and character, in turn, by unexamined tradition. The film focuses on four friends – Shantha, Parvathy, Sri Devi, Lakshmi – who spend their days together and work in the same weaving centre. They are also independent and dauntless, attitudes admired by some but detested by many more in the male-dominated village. Constantly harassed, the women can only turn to the ferryman Krishnan for support and can only find peace together, immersed in Kerala's heart-stopping beauty.

Shantha drives away a suitor, enraged by her husband-to-be's behaviour; Parvathy gets married, and her real misery begins; the town leader harasses Lakshmi on a bus and Shantha fights back. When the town acts against the friends – even their families and

Krishnan desert them – there seems only one way out.

This first feature is not always perfect. Now and again, given the rage of the director, the film's rough edges show, a fact that actually works to its advantage. There is often a naive approach to the way information is presented – a dream-dance sequence comes to mind – but it is a sweet naivete that merges pleasingly with the quiet accomplished performances of the four leading actresses.

– *David Overbey*

**K.P. Sasi**, born into a politically active family (his parents were K.P. Padman and K. Damodaran, the Communist M.P.), came by his interests naturally. While still a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University, he became a political cartoonist, an activity he pursued for three years for national dailies and magazines. His first documentary dates from 1982, the first of many dealing with social and environmental subjects that range from the malpractice of the pharmaceutical industry to the plight of fishermen in Kerala and radiation victims in India. For the last ten years, he and his wife, film activist Ratna Mathur Sasi, have worked to establish a wide network for screening social and political films. *Leaves and Thorns* (93) is his first feature film.

Sponsored by

