



## G. ARAVINDAN

Director, India

This year's retrospective is a return to unvarnished, passionate filmmaking of G. Aravindan who has been honored with so many superlatives and hyperboles in books and retrospectives. Of the richest and most interesting collections of the Library of Congress are two films 'Kanchan Sita' ('Golden Sita') and 'Thampu' ('The Circus Tent'). The directness, clarity and accuracy of his films enable the viewer to both reflect on the universality of the subject matter and relate this to his or her own human attitudes. Aravindan kept changing his cinematic forms consistently during his film career spanning almost fifteen years from his first film 'Uttarayanam' (1974) to his last film 'Vastuhara' (1990). He successfully went beyond the limits and styles of filmmaking created by the new wave filmmakers of that time. This journey towards new facets of narrative included current incidents, history, myths and traditional stories. He also occasionally directed music for other filmmakers while actively participating in theatre movements in Kerala.

Born in Kottayam, Kerala Aravindan was a director, painter and cartoonist with a distinct style. He was well known to the readers of Kerala through his cartoon serial 'Cheriyu Manushyaram Valya Lokavum' ('Small Men and the Big World'), which appeared in the 'Mathrubhoomi' journal during the early 1960s, even before he started with films. These activities fed his interest in films and in the process he surrounded himself with a valuable group of young, talented graduates of Film Institutes. From his very first film Aravindan's main concern has been basic human values. His films show a rare intimacy with landscape and nature. He believed in planning everything before starting the film and also, that the subject should dictate the style of a film. In 1974, Aravindan made 'Uttarayanam', a realistic film about a young boy whose father was killed in the Independence movement of 1942. This influenced the parallel cinema movement in Kerala to a great extent. 'Uttarayanam' won the State film awards for best film, cinematography and screenplay. It also

won the award for the best film about history of Indian Independence, during the 25th anniversary of Indian Independence. After three years Aravindan made his second film 'Kanchan Seeta,' the film was a celluloid adaptation of a play by Sreekantan Nair which won him the National Film award for Best Director (1977). 'Thampu' made in 1978 is a lyrical film that chronicles three days when a circus visits a small village in Kerala and the ripples it creates in a small village. 'Thampu' won Aravindan the National and State film awards for the best director. 'Kummatty' (1979) was one of the most imaginative in the children's film genre. 'Kummatty' is Aravindan's personal favourite film, which won the State award for best children's film. 'Estheppan' (1979) is a magical search into the roots of a legendary character in a fishing village which won the State Film award for best film. 'Pokkuvayil' (1981) is a journey through the complex labyrinths of a young artist's mindscapes, going through a phase of alienation where he imaginatively uses poetry, long takes and elevating music. This won Aravindan the State Film award for best director. 'Chidambaram' (1985) is a deeply symbolic exploration of the man-woman attraction leading to betrayal and eventually to the purgatory of guilt. The film tries to find out whether the morals inflicted by the society on an individual would come in terms with his natural instincts. 'Chidambaram' won the National Film award for Best Film and the State Film Awards for the Best Film and Director (1985). Set in a remote part of Travancore Cochin, 'Oridathu' tells the story of a village where electricity arrives for the first time. The film depicts the narrow mindedness and hypocrisies of village lives with humour. 'Oridathu' won him the National Film award for Best Director and State Film Award for Best Film and Director (1986). 'Marattam' (1988) is about the identification of an actor with his role. Here three different plots of the same event reveal and remain unsolved. Each version is accompanied by different styles of folk-music of Kerala, 'Thampuram Pattu,' 'Pulluvan Pattu' and 'Ayappan Pattu.' His last film 'Vastuhara' (1990) is set in the city of Calcutta, 'Vastuhara' is a story of dispossessed people who lost their land, wealth and identity. 'Vastuhara' won the State Film awards for Best Film and Director (1990).

He was a recipient of the National Film Award the Golden Lotus Award as Best Director thrice (1978/1979/1987). His film 'Chidambaram' (1986) received the National Award for the Best Film.

Film Name | **Chidambaram**



Country | India

## Synopsis

The story develops mainly around three characters, Muniyandi (Sreenivasan), his wife Shivakami (Smita Patil) and the office superintendent of a farm, Shankaran (Gopi). Muniyandi, a labourer in the farm, believes and respects Shankaran. Muniyandi brings Shivakami to the farm, from the temple town of Chidambaram after marrying her. She soon befriends Shankaran, an amateur photographer with a shady past. Their friendship transgresses the hypocritical but deeply felt behavioral codes the local men inherited from previous social formations: i.e., that women are to be denied what men are allowed to enjoy. But one day Muniyandi catches Shankaran red-handed with his wife Shivakami. Broken hearted, Muniyandi commits suicide. The extreme feeling of guilt forces Shankaran to leave the place. He tries 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: He is there to purify himself through religious ritual, while she is now employed to look after the footwear of devotees and tourists. The film ends with a rising crane shot as the camera can only avert its gaze and escape, tilting up along a temple wall towards an open sky.

**1985, 35mm, Colour, Malayalam**

**Director**

Govindan Aravindan

**Cast**

Gopi, Smita Patil, Srinivas, Mohan Das, Murali, Chandran Nair

**Producer**

Suryakanthi Film Makers

**Story**

C.V.Shriraman

**Camera**

Shaji N. Karun

**Music**

P.Devarajan

**Festivals & Awards**

Won the National Film Award for Best Film and the State Film awards for the Best Film and Director (1985)

Film Name | **Thampu**

Country | India

### Synopsis

The film chronicles three days when a circus visits a small village in Kerala and creates ripples in the lives of the people. During this time, we learn the geography of the village - the banyan tree with leaves like transparent film, the shining water, the light in the sand at sunset...

The film shows the lives of the villagers - 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 bizarre characters from the circus merge with the local populace. The circus comes and leaves, and life goes on.



**1978, 35mm, B&W, Malayalam**

**Direction & Screenplay**  
G Aravindan

**Producer**  
K.Ravindranathan Nair, General Pictures

**Cast**  
Gopi, Nudumudi Venu, Sriraman, Jalaja, members of the Great Chitra Circus

**Cinematography**  
Shaji N Karun

**Lyrics**  
Kavalam Narayana Panicker

**Music**  
M G Radhakrishnan

**Festivals & Awards**  
Won the National and State Film Awards for the Best Director

Film Name | **Estheppan****1979, 35mm, Colour, Malayalam****Direction, Co-Screenplay & Co-Music**  
G Aravindan**Producer**  
K.Ravindranathan Nair, General Pictures**Co-Story**  
Kavalam Narayana Panicker**Co-Screenplay**  
Issac Thomas Kottukapally**Cast**  
Rajan Kakkanadan, Krishnapuram Leela, Sudharma, Shobha**Cinematography**  
Shaji N Karun**Co-Music**  
Janardhanan**Festivals & Awards**  
Won the State Film Award for Best Film and Best Director

Country | India

## Synopsis

Estheppan is a fisherman, who lives in a fishing village in Kerala. Estheppan's story unfolds through narrations by other fishermen about his miraculous acts. Through the contradictory statements of these people, a mystical figure of Estheppan unfolds.

The first sequence of Estheppan is a long shot of Estheppan walking by the seashore, which creates an illusory feeling that he is walking over the waves and crossing the sea. Estheppan's miraculous acts like printing his own money and drinking whisky without getting drunk are narrated by people.

He is described as a prophet, miraculous healer, thief and charlatan by different people. 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.

Film Name | **Vastuhara**

Country | India

## Synopsis

Venu (Mohanlal) is a dynamic officer 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 during the turbulent period of the Bangladesh war. There, he meets the Bengali wife of his uncle, Arathi Panikker (Neelanjana Mitra). Aarthi Panikker was living in penury at Calcutta, and is abandoned by her family. Now she is amongst the refugees, whose daughter (Neena Gupta) is held in prison at Calcutta for extremist activities. Venu also befriends her son. This contact with his relatives, whom he had never met, makes Venu acutely aware of their pains. Their brief acquaintance ends at a shipyard where Venu hoards his emigrant refugees on deck and leaves for the islands once more. There are remarkable shots of Mohanlal walking through the crowded Kolkata streets, or standing on the terrace of his hotel, and especially in the last sequence aboard an ancient and over crowded ship, as Venu tries to bring some order into the chaos. Venu himself falls into great misery while trying to help his aunt overcome her troubles.



**1990, 35mm, Colour, Malayalam**

**Direction & Screenplay**  
G Aravindan

**Producer**  
Paragon Movie Makers

**Cast**  
Mohanlal, Shobhana, Neelanjana Mitra, Neena Gupta, Padmini

**Cinematography**  
Sunny Joseph

**Editing**  
K R Bose

**Music**  
Salil Choudhury

**Festival & Awards**  
Won the State Film award for Best Film and Director (1990)

Film Name | **Kanchan Seeta**



1977, 35mm, Colour, Malayalam

**Director**

G. Aravindan

**Producer**

Ravindranathan Nair (General Pictures)

**Cast**

Ramdas, Venkateshwaralu, Chinna Pulliah, Kesava Panickar, Krishnan, Pottiah, Rangiah, Siva, Sobha Kiran, Annapurna

**Script**

G. Aravindan

**Story**

Based on a play by C. N. Sreekantan Nair

**Cinematography**

Shajee N. Karun

**Music**

Rajeev Taranath

**Festivals & Awards**

Won the National Film Award for Best Director (1977)

Country | India

## Synopsis

The story is set in an interior tribal area of Andhra Pradesh. Living there are illiterate tribal people, who recite the story of Ramayana fluently. Their physical appearance resemble some murals connected to the Ramayana. `Kanchana Seetha' interprets the story from the epic Ramayana, where Lord Ram (Ramdas) sends his wife Seetha to the jungle to satisfy his subjects. Here, the golden Seetha substitutes the biological one. `Kanchana Seeta' alludes to the golden image of Seetha, which Rama sets by his side for the Aswamedha Yaga. The poet Valmiki (Panicker), moved by this event, composed the story of Rama as an epic. The film also explores Rama's extreme sense of duty that forces him forsake Seetha, contrasted to his intense longing for her. The epilogue shows Rama begin his endless journey, as he walks towards the river holding the fire in his hand.

Seeta is never seen in the film. She is represented here by the spirit of nature and its movements and sounds - the wind rustling in the trees or rain bringing harmony where discord threatens.





Retrospective - G Aravindan

