

# Chit-Chat

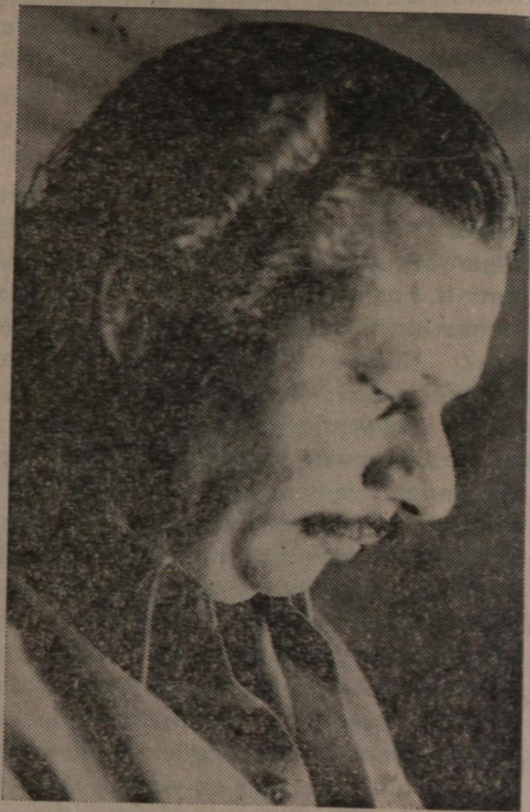
Adoor GOPALAKRISHNAN

with

M. F. Thomas

## ON ELIPPATHAYAM

Adoor Gopalakrishnan's latest film *ELIPPATHAYAM* brought in recognition not only for Malayalam Cinema but for Indian Cinema itself when it won the 1982



BFI Award announced at the close of this year's London Film Festival. The only

other Indian director to win this prestigious award is Satyajit Ray for his 'Apur Sansar' in 1959. The BFI Film Award, given by the British Film Institute every year, is for 'the maker of the most original and imaginative film introduced at the National Film Theatre during the past one year. The National Film Theatre, a complex of Art Cinema house regularly screens films of distinction from all over the world. Out of more than one thousand films shown at the NFT, including the one hundred and odd films shown in the London Film Festival, a committee of critics selects one film every year for the BFI Award. Earlier recipients of this award include Ozu, Bresson, Antonioni, Goddard, Oshima, Resnais, Rivette, Olmi, Fassbinder, Bertolucci and Kobayashi.

Here are the extracts from an exclusive interview CLOSE LOOK had with Adoor on *Elippathayam* (Rat-Trap).

**Q.** What is the content and structure of *Elippathayam*?

**A.** The film is about change, change that is painful but inevitable.

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.



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The economic, social, cultural and even moral decay of a pattern of living come in for close examination. There are of course many more things, in the background; I do not push them to the fore-ground. They are there for those who want to see more. The audience does not have to be necessarily conscious that the filmmaker is trying to do this or that. The intentions should get embedded in the treatment so that the audience does not get to see the scheme. The scheme of things, the skeleton, should not show.

I told you the first three departures are of the rats. The rats have been given human attributes. The sounds used while the rats are taken out to signify the rituals given to the human dead; the drone of the tamborins and the jinkling of the 'chelanka'. The sounds of the crows over the still surface of the pond water should evoke an experience in the audience about the funeral rituals. Here is an equation between the rats and humans. (The use of rats in the film is not symbolic, for heaven's sake, no). After a time the rats vanish from sight, but their attributes remain and grow and they are used for the humans.

So the film is structured in such a way as it should lend itself to many interpretations at different levels of understanding.

Q. This is your first feature film in colour. Considering the theme of the film, do you think colour was a must?

A. Colour was essential for this film. And I think I have used colour meaningfully. For instance let us take the use of colour for the dress worn by the main characters: Primary colours are used for the three sisters. The elder sister wears shades of

green. Green suggests practicability, earthiness, maturity, worldly-wiseness. The second sister wears blue suggesting submissiveness, nobility, spirituality, serenity and even doom. Then, the youngest sister wears clothes in predominant shades of red which indicates youth, vitality, life and revolt. You mix these primary colours, you have white. And I have given that white to the man, with vertical stripes on his shirt. Vertical stripes suggest unrestfulness. And these characters are set to a basic circular pattern of movement against the drab grey tone of the wooden house - a perfect foil of decay and degeneration.

Q. Of the three films you have made, why do you consider *Elippathayam* the one closest to you?

A. Generally, to a filmmaker, his last is his best. In my case it is more so. It is a part of my being, in the sense that I lived with it, I gave so much to it. Right now I am what this film is, atleast till I make the next. This film is the closest to me in another sense; the economic background of my family, the kind of the family shown in the film, even the very architecture of the house, is very much like the one in which I grew up. Secondly, I wrote the script of the film at a time when I was going through a terrible period of emotional crisis. More than ever before I felt that I should go in for very intense introspection. I thought that was the right time for me to look inwardly, within myself, very closely, very thoroughly and very cruelly. All this has a bearing on what I did. After seeing the film in Calcutta, last January, Mrinal Sen told me, 'I can see it in the film, you have gone through hell. Only



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one who has suffered such emotional strain can make such a film, with such intensity'. He was right, one hundred percent. That is why I said, it is part of me. And hence closest to me.

Q. This film is very much rooted in our life, culture, customs, tradition and practices. Did foreigners follow the film in full and what was their reaction?

A. In fact, I had my own doubts. As you said, it is very much rooted in the life we live in Kerala, it makes lot of allusions to our past and present. But after every screening, during the discussions that followed, the reaction expressed was just the opposite. They said they could follow the film completely somehow, though the culture and life were alien to them. "After a few minutes the film traps you in, you get into it. The film itself teaches you the life lived there. The appeal of the film is absolutely universal. We learned a few things watching this film".

Q. Of the three films you made, do you feel this is 'the' perfect film?

A. I would say no film is perfect. Because after a film is made, you feel sorry that you did not go there on location again and shot one more shot; you should not have let this actor stand like that, you should have probably cut a few more frames from a particular scene etc. You are never happy. You never feel you made a perfect film. Atleast I do not feel so. I do everything possible within the constraints of a budget and practicability to strive towards perfection. I do not know if I would ever achieve it.

Q. Do you feel that this film is received well at home also?

A. I had first been to Cannes with this

film. I had been to Chicago, London and Nantes too with this film in the recent past. Everywhere the critics were curious to know how this film was received at home. I thought their interest was very genuine. Generally films of a serious nature are considered to be out of bounds for the public at large. In India, they are even nick-named 'award films' a sure tag for the audiences at large to take note of and avoid straying in. But when I told them that this film which is probably the most difficult and most complex of the three I have made, was received well, they said, 'well, you have a very good audience'. One of the main reasons for this situation in Kerala is the film society movement. And ofcourse, as a filmmaker, I donot negate the audience. An understanding audience at home is my strength.

Q. How did you plan the making of this film?

A. First I write the script, in as much detail as possible. Then I go to the location, study various possibilities. Then I come back and improve on what I had already written. I even sketch some important sequences so that I donot forget to incorporate it at the time of shooting. For Elippathayam I scouted the whole of Central Travancore looking for the right house and the location.

Q. How did you select the artistes?

A. After I write the script I look for actor who can look the character. For this film I chose Karamana and Sarada in the lead roles for they looked the character and I knew them very well. They are extremely good artistes. But in my way of work I do not explain



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the whole lot to the artist. I do not let any artist read my script. When they act, they are acting to me. They are not interpreting a role. What I am looking for in an actor is whether he can really respond to me. If he can, he is cast, if he can't he is not

Q. Do you feel more responsible by getting this International recognition?

A. Responsible, yes. I do not think an award can really corrupt me I have never taken filmmaking lightly. I see it as my life. This is my only way of expression. This is the only way I can communicate with people and I am very serious about it. I am very respectful to my audience. I consider my audience as the most intelligent beings with whom I want to have a meaningful dialogue. That is why I am serious about everything I do in my film, about every frame I am serious about everything I do in my film about every frame I compose, every sound that I use, about every kind of lighting I go in for. I have tremendous regard for my audience. It should be their pleasure to discover things in my film.

I know they will see everything, I realise they should feel honoured in participating in the experience of exploring my film.

Q. Now that you are happy with the BFI award, let us go back to the National awards where Elippathayam was adjudged a mere 'best regional film'. What do you feel about it?

A. I agree I felt bad because, more than any one else the filmmaker should know about his work. I do not have to wait for a critic to tell me whether my film is good or bad. Basically, the awards, any awards for that matter, generally reflect not the character of the Jury than the quality of the film. From a very bad jury, a very good film gets the award. From a very bad jury, even if you get an award, it is an accident and it is not much of an honour.

Q. The period of gap between the first film and second was five years, between the second and the third, four years. So, when will be the fourth one?

A. In that order, may be in three years! Probably, I may cut it shorter. I am right now working on a script. □

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## bfi award

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(contd. from page 3)

past winners of the Award are as follows:

1981- Helma Sanders - Brahm (No Mercy, No Future), 1980 - Peter Greenaway (The falls) and Xie Jin (Two stage sisters) 1979 - Yilmaz Guney (The Herd) 1978 Mark Rappaport (The Scenic Route) 1977- Hans-Jurgen Syberberg (Hitler-A film from Germany), 1976-Nagisa Oshima (Empire of the Senses) 1975-Theo Angelopoulos (The Travelling Players) 1974-R.W. Fassbinder (Martha), 1973-Georgy

Shengelaya (Pirosmani), 1972-Fernando Solanas (The hour of the Furnaces) 1971- Robert Bresson (Four Nights of Dreamer) 1970-Bernardo Bertolucci (The Conformist) 1969-Jacques Rivette (L'Amour Fou) 1968. Jean-Marie Straub (Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach) 1967-Masaki Kobayashi (Rebellion) 1966 - Andre Delvaux (The man who had His Hair Cut short) 1965 - Jean-Luc-Godard (Pierrot le Fou) 1964 - Grigori Kozintsev (Hamlet) 1963 - Alain Resnais (Muriel), 1962-Jacques Rivette (Paris Nous Appartient); 1961 - Ermanno Olmi (Il Posto) □



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## NEW YEAR PROGRAMME

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### American Theatre Group Films

8th Jan. '83	5-45 p. m.	—	THE MAIDS
9th Jan. '83	5-45 p. m.	—	IN CELEBRATION
	7-45 p. m.	—	PHILADELPHIA
11th Jan. '83	6-45 p. m.	—	DELICATE BALANCE
12th Jan. '83	6-45 p. m.	—	RHINOCEROUS

### *tagore theatre*

on 8th Jan. '83 there will be additional programme of  
a FINLAND film (Antti Treebranch) at 7.45 p. m.

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Efforts are being made to screen documentaries on ASIAD '82 during the programme.

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### FASSBINDER RETROSPECTIVE

A retrospective of Fassbinder films is scheduled from 26th Jan. '83,  
at Museum Auditorium. For details please refer Page No.17

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screenings are subject to arrival of films  
admission to the auditorium closes by 6.50 p.m.  
CHILDREN and GUESTS are not entertained



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## ADDITIONAL PROGRAMME

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### Fassbinder Retrospective

at

#### *Museum Auditorium*

[ Courtesy: Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi ]

Member No.	Date	Time	Title
Double up to	26th Jan. '83	5.45 P.M.	Vegetable Peddler
D 1200		7.15 "	Gods of Plague
"	29th Jan. '83	5.45 "	Bolwieser
"		7.30 "	Freedom of Geeshe Gottfried
Double above D 1200	27th Jan. '83	5.45 "	Vegetable Peddler
and Single upto S 3500		7.15 "	Gods of Plague
" "	30th Jan. '83	5.45 "	Bolweiser
" "		7.30 "	Freedom of Geeshe Gottfried
Single above	28th Jan. '83	5.45 "	Vegetable Peddler
S 3500		7.15 "	Gods of Plague
"	31st Jan. '83	5.45 "	Bolweiser
"		7.30 "	Freedom of Geeshe Gottfried