

## After 8 years, Adoor Gopalakrishnan set for his next outing

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Adoor Gopalakrishnan



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**By Gautaman Bhaskaran**

After an abnormally long interval of eight years, celebrated and highly honoured film director Adoor Gopalakrishnan will step behind the camera with his latest, *Pinneyum*. The principal photography will begin on May 11 in Thiruvananthapuram. This will be his 12th feature.

His last work — *Oru Pennum Randaanum* (A Climate for Crime) — opened in 2008, a year after his *Naalu Pennungal* (Four Women) came.

Gopalakrishnan told me from his home in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday that the English title of *Pinneyum* would be *Once Again*. And how apt, given the auteur's hiatus.

His fans had been wondering — and even worrying — that he might not wield the megaphone any more, the loss of his wife some months ago adding to what some perceived as his professional disinterest.

In the history of cinema, we know a Shammi Kapoor, who refused to come out of his bedroom for three months after his young wife, Geeta Bali, died of smallpox. Kapoor was then in the midst of shooting for Vijay Ananda's *Teesri Manzil*, and producer Nasir Hussain understood the star's pain and waited. When Kapoor re-emerged and completed *Teesri Manzil*, it turned out to be one of his best ever performances as Rocky, a star singer in a Mussoorie hotel who gets entangled in a murder.

It is quite possible that personal loss and agony sometimes help bring out the best in us, and Pinneyum may well turn out to be yet another masterpiece of the man who gave us gems like Swayamvaram, Elippathayam, Kodiyettam, Vidheyam, Mukhamukham, Anantaram and so on. But the intervals between these movies have been never as long as eight years; they have usually been four or five years or less.

Gopalakrishnan once told me — during my long interviews with him when I was writing a biography of his — that he liked to reflect for a long time after completing a film before getting down to the next. "I take my own time to write a story or pick one and then to pen the screenplay," he said, despite men like Satyajit Ray urging Adoor to make at least one movie a year.

I do not know much about Pinneyum except that it will star Kavya Madhavan (who was seen in Gopalakrishnan's earlier Naalu Pennungal) and Dileep — with whom he had been wanting to work for a long time.

Normally, Gopalakrishnan does not work with stars. There have been exceptions though like Madhu, Mammooty and Sarada. Now, Dileep is a star all right.

The plot of Pinneyum is being kept under wraps, but all that Gopalakrishnan would reveal now is that it "will be an intense love story". Of the little that I know of him, his latest outing is not going to be hot stuff (on the lines of explicit French cinema, which he is quite fond of). But it may be subtle and subdued, but provocative, as far as the content goes. Adoor is known for this.

Take Swayamvaram (One's Own Choice). It stormed Kerala's conservative citadels of celluloid. Its story was radical, certainly so in the early 1970s. Synchronised sound and outdoor locales were unheard of, or almost, then in Kerala. Gopalakrishnan used his Nagra recorder, carried his camera beyond the studio walls to film the story of Viswanathan and Sita, who, defying their parental wish, run away to a city to live together. A man and a woman living together outside wedlock was enough to spark sensation. Gopalakrishnan's first work that opened in 1972 did that and more.

Adoor's Mathilukal in 1989 (with Mammooty playing Vaikom Muhammad Basheer) is also a uniquely strange love story, which is set in prison during the British Raj. When the political prisoners leave — Basheer's name is strangely missing from the list — he is lonely and even hatches a plot to escape. But suddenly the voice of a woman prisoner that wafts across the high wall separating the men's wing from the women's lifts his sagging spirit.

She is Narayani, the youngest there, the most beautiful, as she claims in the beginning. She has committed murder. Gopalakrishnan uses sheer eroticism to describe their meetings. There is tenderness, there is love and there is also the comic, but all kept at more than an arm's length by cold concrete. When Narayani throws a dead branch in the air to tell Basheer that she is there next to the wall, he gently caresses it, his yearning for affectionate touch perhaps shared by her as well. We are never taken to the other side. We never meet Narayani.

Let us see what kind of romantic story Pinneyum will be.

Thozha

Comparisons may be odious, but they are inevitable, more so in cinema when a film is inspired by or remade from another — as is the case with Vamsi's Thozha. Quite similar in plot, Thozha with Telugu superstar Nagarjuna and Karthi is a Tamil version (there is also a Telugu edition) of the 2011 French work by Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano, called The Intouchables.

Essentially a buddy movie with Omar Sy playing, Driss, a poor black caregiver with a criminal record, for a white millionaire paraplegic, Philippe (Francois Cluzet), The Intouchables is at 113 minutes extremely focussed in conveying underlying class barriers and how they are bridged. Driss' devil-may-care attitude ultimately helps him win over the staid Philippe and

push the wheelchair-bound and paralysed from the neck man back into a life of laughter and fun that he enjoyed before a paragliding accident turned him into an invalid.

Vamsi retains all these in Thozha, but builds up a screenplay that loses sight of the fact that this is, above all, a film about two men and how they bond over wheels. Songs and dramatic familial squabbles — involving Seenu (played by Karthi who reprises Sy's role), his foster mother, sister and brother — not just distract us from the core narrative but also seem like a drag. Yes, the Tamil movie is almost 176 minutes, which is a full hour and three minutes longer than the French work.

Also, Thozha — where Nagarjuna as Vikram, essays paraplegic Cluzet's part — is overly sentimental and goes overboard with its emotional quotient. Vamsi could have clipped off all these tear-jerkers to get his film firmly on the wheelchair — let us say, as a dialogue between two men, one rich and powerful but physically disadvantaged to the core, and the other an impoverished social misfit but with an amazing zest for life. And Senu's gusto is so irresistibly infectious that Vikram catches the bug and slips out of morose and gloom.

Thozha begins, just like *The Intouchables*, with a crazy scene on a road. Seenu is driving Vikram in one of his swanky cars, and getting impatient at a signal, begins to race till the cops catch up with the two. In what can be seen as perfect camaraderie, Vikram feigns illness when the police accost the duo, and the men in uniform escort them to hospital!

The plot then unfolds as a flashback. We see Seenu reluctantly taking up the job as Vikram's caregiver only in order to make sure that his parole from jail translates into a reprieve of his sentence. Soon, the two men — supervised by Vikram's pretty secretary, Keerthi (Tamannaah) — settle down to a routine, which is broken by some hilarity. There is a scene where Seenu completely besotted and distracted by Keerthi, does some crazy things — like spilling boiling hot water on Vikram, who does not feel the heat at all!

Finally, the three take off to Paris on a trip of nostalgia, a city where Vikram found and lost his love. And for Seenu, a guy from the gutters, this is a dream come true, and there are long sequences of Paris by night — totally unnecessary in this day and age.

Certainly this is not the 1960s, when Raj Kapoor gave us a *Sangam* and an *Around the World* and literally took us on a guided tour of several exotic locales. Vamsi needed to have excised parts like these to make the story telling crisper, and thereby, more engrossing. Unduly verbose (especially when compared with the French original), the film loses its sense of male bonding — particularly after it veers into love stories.

A word about performances. Admittedly, Karthi has been well cast here, and as the rowdy from the roadside, he sparkles with his uncouth mannerisms. But unfortunately, Karthi's personality can get so overwhelming that it stops him from sinking into a character as we have seen in some of his earlier works. While Nagarjuna's role offers little scope, wheelchair-bound as he is, Tamannaah is her usual wooden self. She seems like an ice-maiden, and as Keerthi in a portrayal replicating that of the secretary in *The Intouchables*, Tamannaah is a huge disappointment.

Gautaman Bhaskaran, who may be e-mailed at [gautamanb@hotmail.com](mailto:gautamanb@hotmail.com), has written a detailed biography of Adoor Gopalakrishnan — titled *Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Life in Cinema*