

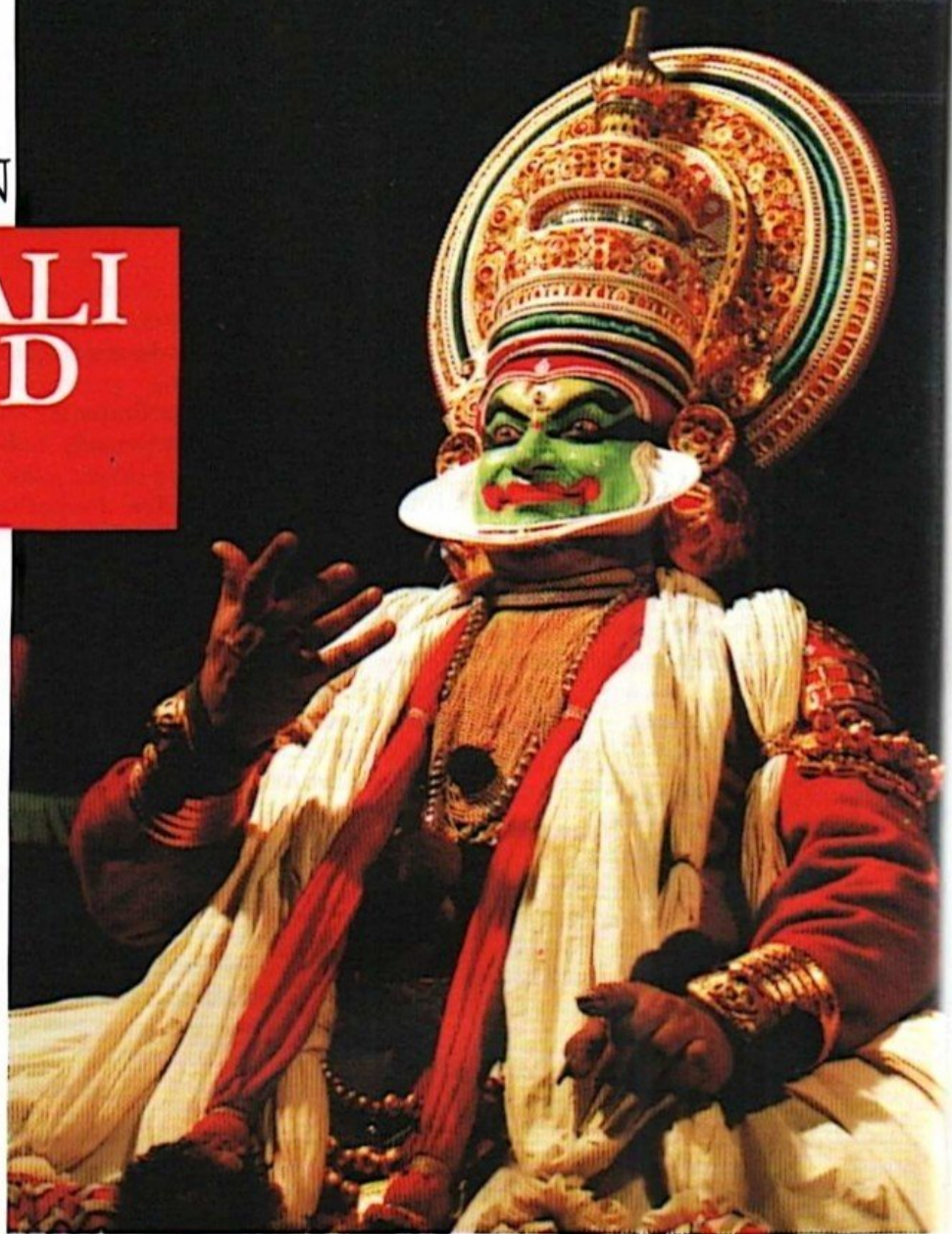
Artiste of the Month

KALAMANDALAM  
GOPALAKRISHNAN

## KATHAKALI GURU AND DANCER

-Lakshmi V

*Kathakali has become a tourist attraction in Kerala. The highly stylized dance form with strikingly painted face and trained exaggerated facial expressions and body movements, showcases Kerala to the world. Kalamandalam C Gopalakrishnan is a dedicated artiste who has popularized this dance form in Mumbai.*



*Kalamandalam Gopalakrishnan as Satyavan (left) in Satyavan Savitri*

**C**honat Gopalakrishnan is a leading Kathakali exponent of Western India and has been teaching Kathakali and Mohiniattam for the past 30 years at Nalanda Nritya Kala Mahavidyalaya, Mumbai. He has also performed at various centres in India and countries like Russia, Singapore, USA, Canada, Europe, etc at ICCR sponsored programmes with the Nalanda troupe headed by Dr Kanak Rele, a veteran exponent of Kathakali and Mohiniattam.

A skilled Mohiniattam teacher, Gopalakrishnan is currently a member of the Core Research group with Dr Kanak Rele and Kavalam Narayana Panicker for the revival and rejuvenation of Mohiniattam.

He has choreographed solo items and several dance dramas namely, *Karuna*, *St Francis*, *Kavya Kairali*, and directed classical art forms in the *Mamankam*

2000 and the famous *Mumbai pooram*. Among his Kathakali repertoires are *Satyavan Savitri*, *Naranathu Bhrandan* and *Prithavishadam* which he has choreographed. Since he is a teacher at the Mumbai Deemed University of Nalanda, he takes graduate and post graduate classes in the dance forms and conducts workshops in his field of expertise. Gopalakrishnan has conducted theatre workshops along with Prof Waman Kendre, Dept of Theatre, Mumbai University and choreographed Kathakali actions for some Hindi plays.

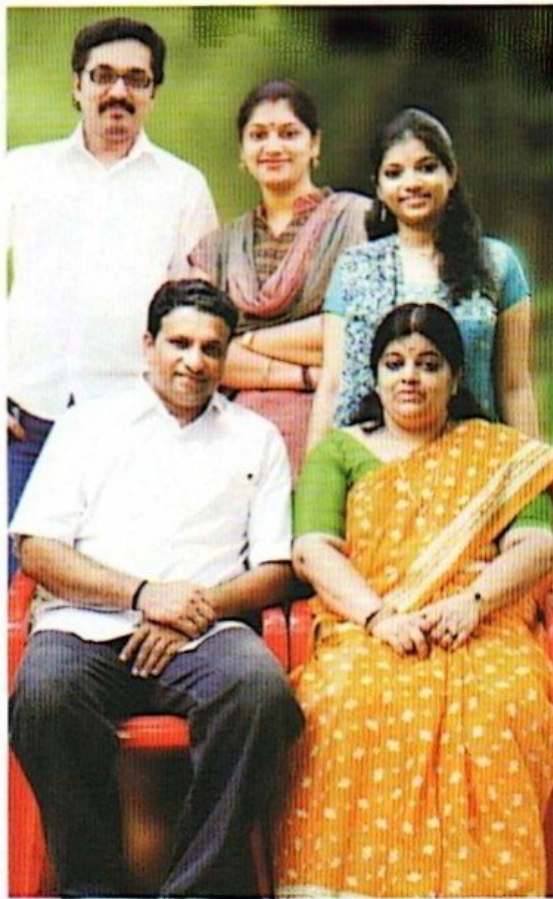
Gopalakrishnan hails from Shoranur where he completed his early schooling. Son of the late MK Narayana Menon who worked in the railways and the late Lakshmi Kutty Amma, his family was always lovers of music and dance. His mother used to sing. When he was 13, he joined Kerala Kalamandalam and continued there for 9 years to complete the post-graduate Diploma in Kathakali and later MA in Kathakali from this deemed university of Kerala.

He learnt the basics of Carnatic music under Kalamandalam Vasudeva Panikker and continued Carnatic music training under Venkitachalam. He had the opportunity to perform Kathakali along with stalwarts like Padmabhushan Kalamandalam Raman Kutty Nair, Padmasri Kalamandalam Gopi, Kalamandalam Padmanabhan Nair and others. He has also essayed major roles in Nalanda Productions like *Dashavatar*, *Rugmini Swayamvar*, *Swapna Vasavadatta* etc.

Gopalakrishnan came to Mumbai after completing his PG Diploma in 1982 and has since been with Nalanda. While in olden days, the performances used to continue from dusk to early hours of the morning, today the Kathakali programme duration is generally 3 hours only. The themes are usually taken from the Puranas, Ramayana and Mahabharata or stories of saints, (even Christian faith).

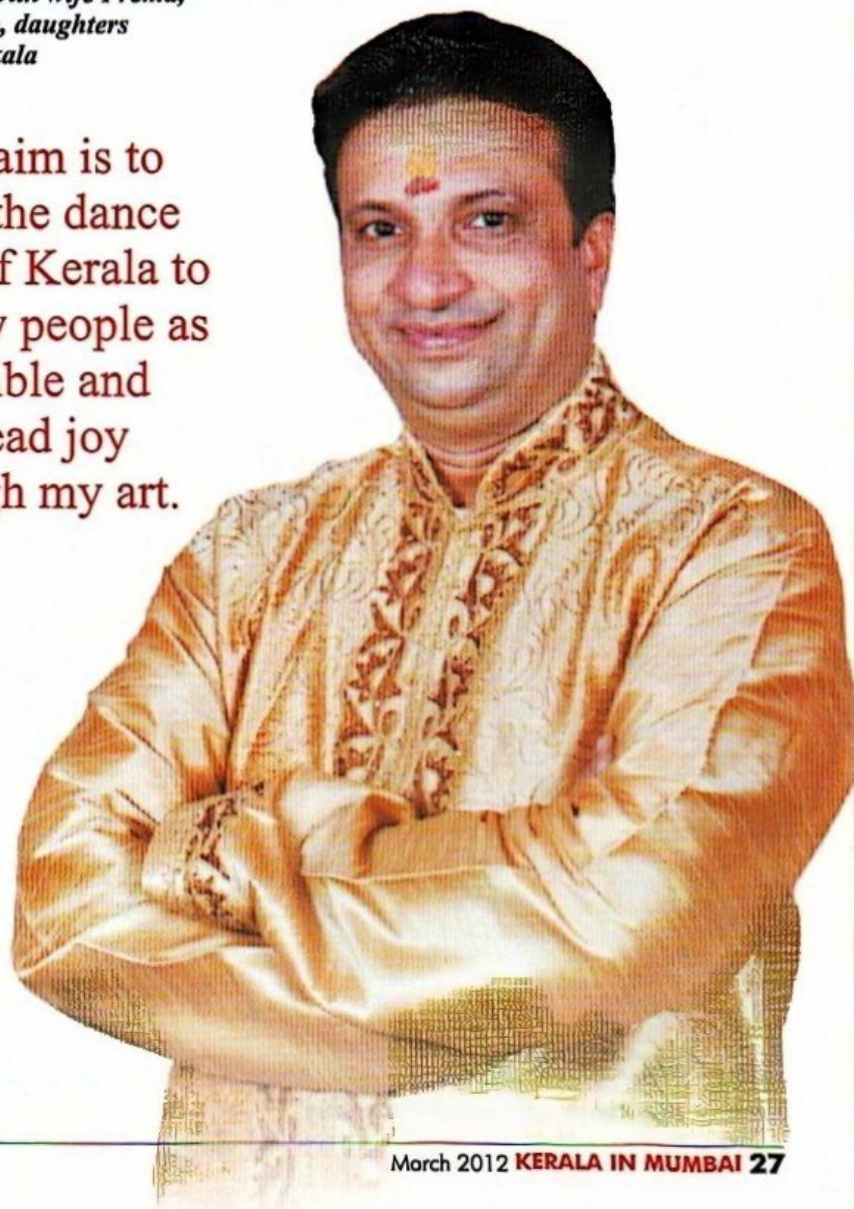
Gopalakrishnan has been specially trained in applying body massage which is compulsory for Kathakali dancers. He is an accomplished *nattuvanar* at dance shows.

Gopalakrishnan has been recipient of the Government of India Scholarship for Kathakali, and is 'A' Grade Artiste of Doordarshan. He has been felicitated by 'Ragasudha' for contribution to Kathakali and awarded citation 'Nrithyachudamani' by 'Padam' an organization of Connoisseurs of Classical Arts of Mumbai.



*Gopalakrishnan with wife Prema, son-in-law Anoop, daughters Gomathi and Srikala*

**“My aim is to bring the dance forms of Kerala to as many people as possible and spread joy through my art.**



Gopalakrishnan is convinced that classical arts would never die. His advice to those learning the arts is not to commercialise it. “Bring out the essence of Kerala in your Kathakali performance,” he says. “All art forms are divine. Only through God's grace can one have the good fortune to teach or learn the fine arts.

“My aim is to bring the dance forms of Kerala to as many people as possible and spread joy through my art. I also want to make the common man understand and experience the classical arts.”

Gopalakrishnan's wife Prema is a housewife hailing from Shoranur. They have two daughters. The elder one, Gomathi, is married and living in Dubai with her husband Anoop Menon, a software engineer. Gomathi has learnt Carnatic Music and Kathakali. Their second daughter, Srikala, has completed her graduation and is doing MBA by correspondence. She is learning Bharatanatyam also.