



National film archive of india

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
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Interview of Senior Film Artist Kothamangalam Seenu by Randor Guy

00:00:00

This is Randor Guy interviewing Mr. Kothamangalam Seenu. Mr. Seenu is one of the senior most movie artists of south Indian cinema. For a period in 1930s and 1940s he was one of the well-known singing heroes of Tamil Cinema. He has been actively associated with the world of arts as a musician as a movie artist and also as an actor. Both on stage at first and later in Tamil cinema. He has acted in a number of well-known films like *Kacha Devayani*, like *Manimekalai*, and many others. This interview, the first one, takes place at his residence in Adyar, Madras on the afternoon of Friday, January 8, 1988. Mr. Kothamangalam Seenu speaks in Tamil.

00:01:00

Q: Greetings Mr. Seenu. I am very pleased to meet you. For a long time, the National film archives of India has been showing their desire to interview you and know about your experiences, the films you've acted, the artists you knew from the early cinema age, actors and actresses, the way Tamil cinema was shot in those days, how was the circumstances back then, about all these. About Tamil cinema history. To know about it formally from the right sources. The NFAI in Pune wants to archive materials like these for those who have interest in understanding about Tamil cinema history. So many people are interested today to know about it unlike before. People within the country and outside the

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country as well. Only some recognised artists like you are surviving. Rest have gone. So we decided to do programmes like these with the people living now. I have done with many such personalities like M K Radha, R M Krishnaswamy, S D Subbulakshmi, many like these. It is difficult to identify where most of them live. I met you at S V Venkatraman's residence. I have also done his interview. I have got the fortune to do your interview only on 88 January. I am very happy about it. You immediately agreed to it without minding about your health condition. We are very grateful to you for that. Shall we begin the interview?

A: Sure

00:02:23

Q: How did you get this name 'Kothamangalam Seenu'? Kothamangalam is the name of a place, isn't it? Where is it?

A: It's in Ramnad district.

Q: Is it in Chettinad?

A: Yes, Chettinad, it's 3 miles east of Kanadukathan.

Q: Is it your native place?

A: no not my native place

Q: Then how did you get the name?

A: When I came to Cinema, I gave it as my village name. I was a music teacher in that place.

Q: Which means, it is not your native place?

A: My native place is Chozhavandan.

Q: Madurai CR Mahalingam's place.

A: Although I am from that place, I haven't spent much time there. I was raised in a place called Vathirayirupu.

Q: Near Madurai?

A: yes

Q: There is a famous advocate from that place, 'Watrap' Subramaniam.

A: Yes the same place. Though I am from that place, all my activities happened in Madurai.

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Q: What do you mean by saying activities?

A: means, after quitting education, while searching for jobs, I joined a drama company.

Q: I remember you saying somewhere that you come from a musical family.

A: yes

Q: Your family is musical family?

A: Can't say a musical family. But my father, even his elder brother, that is S V Venkataraman's father..

Q: The music director? His father is your uncle?

A: Yes. They were all great experts in music.

Q: Is it so? They sing?

A: They sing. Vidwans they were.

Q: Is your father a vidwan too?

A: Yes. He is a vidwan but worked in the Collector's office.

Q: Oh. He was working and was having music as a hobby

A: Yes. Like a hobby

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Subramania Iyer.

Q: Where was his collector office? In Madurai?

A: Yes. He was also doing many tuitions also there.

Q: Which means you sing from your childhood?

A: Yes

Q: It would have come in the blood?

A: Yes you can say that. He passed away when I was eleven years old. Then I was at my uncle's...

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Q: Where was it?

A: In Vathirayirupu.

Q: Is it the Tamil name for 'Watrap?' Watrap is the anglicised name for it.

A: There I lived with my uncle and did my education.

Q: Was it a village or a town?

A: It was an administrative place

Q: Like a Taluk headquarters.

A: Yes. Then I couldn't learn further. I was bad at studies. So I came to Madurai.

A relative of ours on the father's side lived there.

Q: In Madurai?

A: Yes in Madurai. I went and told him this. That I am not being able to do well in studies. I need a job. I don't understand what to do in life.

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Q: How old were you then?

A: I was 13 then.

Q: When you came to Madurai..

A: Yes.. at that time. I was in Madurai only till age 11. I was studying in a school there.

Q: I see

A: They were like, you are such a small boy, 13 years old. What should we do with you. It went on like that for some time. He was my father's ammanji.

Q: What relation is exactly *ammanji*?

A: Uncle's son. Cousin. He took me to Subramania Iyer, who is M S Subbulakshmi's father.

Q: Who Subramania Iyer?

A: Yes.

00:06:00

Q: Which means Shanmukhavadivu...

A: Yes Shanmukhavadivu's husband. His name was Subramania Iyer. He was a lawyer.

Q: What was he doing?

A: That's what. Lawyer who visits courts and all.

Q: One who finds case?

A: Yes. Related to cases.

Q: He is not a Sangeetha vidwan?

A: No no

Q: He was not related to music at all?

A: No, but he is a music lover.

00:06:19

Q: Why I asked because, in some circles, Subbulakshmi is known as Ariyakudi's daughter, Madura Pushpavanam's daughter...all these things are heard. This I can't go and ask her.

A: She herself has written it in her biography. About her father.

Q: So you went and asked him what can be done for you.

A: Yes. I asked him. Then I saw, there was a drama company.

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Q: Which company?

A: Sankardas company

Q: Sankardas Swamigal. His drama company?

A: Yes. I joined that drama company.

Q: Did you have direct acquaintance with Sankardas Swamigal?

A: No I didn't. when I joined drama, he wasn't there.

Q: 1922 he passed away I think

A: Yes. I joined in 24.

Q: Oh he had left by then. Who was running the Sabha then?

A: A person called Chinmaya Pillai from Madurai. He was the proprietor.

Q: For the Sabha?

A: Yes. T K brothers were the..

Q: I see. They were in the Sabha then. I see it was the Boys Company.

A: Yes Boys Company. But they left the company and went back. They were from Kollam. They went back and set up their own company. In Trivandrum. I had gone from Madurai to do the replacement for a play there.

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Q: Who did you replace there?

A: An actor called Muthuswamy

Q: I see. The one who played female roles. In Menaka, he played the female role.

A: Yes yes. I played that role later.

Q: I see. The first roles you played in dramas were female role. A: Yes

Q: I see. You used to sing well and were good looking?

A: I did a lot of mythological plays. After that, my throat wasn't doing good. I started to play smaller roles then.

Q: In dramas. In the same company?

A: No I had gone to another company then.

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Q: Which was that?

A: A person called Pazhaniya Pillai was running a company. I became part of it.

Q: They were also in Madurai?

A: Yes. In Madurai. But I joined them in a place called Ambasamudram.

Q: I see, they were travelling and camping in different places.

A: Yes. I travelled all over Kerala with them like in places like Kottayam, Changanassery

Q: Which means in those times, Tamil dramas had a big acceptance in places in Kerala.

A: Yes because Malayalam doesn't have many plays. So they used to watch Tamil plays mostly.

Q: Hmm.. that's interesting.

A: And that too, if you sing well and get recognised there, it is of a high reputation.

Q: Oh. You have to sing well to become popular.

A: Yes. That happened and then I left that company and was clueless and jobless. I came back to my native place.

Q: Where, to Watrap?

A: Yes to Watrap. There Watrap Sama Iyengar..

Q: Who was he?

A: A Maha Vidwaan.

Q: Musician.

A: Yes. He was Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar's guru.

Q: Ariyakkudi's guru too..

A: Ariyakkudi was senior.

Q: I see

A: I learnt music from him

Q: I see you learnt Carnatic music from him.

A: Yes Carnatic music. I decided not to sit idle.

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Q: He was there in Watrap then?

A: Yes he was there. I learnt from him and started doing music concerts. Then I had to come back to Madurai. What else to do, I finally had to open a drama company. I was a small boy then. My concerts also didn't have much people coming in. I wasn't earning much either. We started a Sabha called Venugopalagana Sabha.

Q: Who started it?

A: Me, Santhanam..

Q: He was an actor?

A: Yes actor. He was a raja part. Him, Kochi Narayanan..some of us got together and started the Venugopalagana Sabha

Q: I see. You all started on your own.

A: Yes. A person called Sundara Vathiyar. He was the master of the Sabha. He gave everyone their roles...

Q: Vathiyar..

A: Yes Vathiyar. When I was 13 years old...there was a school students old boys association. The students who were there with me in Sethu school.

Q: Sethu school. In Madurai?

A: Yes. They had something like a Sabha. When we were doing a play in that Sabha, a play called 'Gnana Soundari'

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Q: I see, it was a play first. It later became a film.

A: Yes. We were planning to host the play. At that time, Sundara vathiyar's mother Karuppaiamma, put the first make up on me. In that way, Sundara Vadiyar began my drama career. He was my first guru. He writes lovely songs. He writes it according to the requirement. He was very talented. He was also a harmonist. He very well knew what voices suit what parts. Once again, I was going into the zone of what to do in life. That lead me to Kothamangalam. To Kanadukathan in fact.

Q: Why did you go to that place?

A: There was a mridangam vidwan. A person called Ganesan whom I knew. He took me with him.

Q: To Kanadukathan?

A: To Kanadukathan. When I went to figure out things there, I again got drama chances only. There many legends of music including Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Veena Sambasiva Iyer, they were all running a sabha together.

Q: Where? In Kanadukathan?

A: Yes. That was a big temple. To gather fund for it, they had organised this play. It had Valli Thirumanam, Valli's marriage. In that play, I had a female part. I

played Valli. Another vidwan was Velan. He was a mridangam vidwan, Marayppa Iyer. He is the one who plays the old man roles. Murugan was Muthu Iyer, who plays harmonium.

Q: All musicians?

A: Yes, all musicians. We all did the drama together. The drama went on for a few days. And it stopped after a while. Everyone had their work to do. One Vengusamy Iyer was its chief. He was Kavi Kunjara Bharati's relative. He was an agent at that time. He was a very kind man. I am indebted to him. I asked him to give me some work. He had a rice mill at that time. He appointed me as an accountant there.

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Q: Where was this rice mill?

A: A place called Rayavaram. I was there for 3 or 4 months. I didn't like that either. When I did a play in a Sabha. Among the people who worked with me were Kothamangalam Subbu.

Q: What was he doing there?

A: He was also an accountant at the Chettiyar's house.

Q: what was his native place? Was it Kothamangalam?

A: His was Thennadi in Thanjavur district.

Q: He went there in search of work?

A: He had gone there and he was married there.

Q: In Kothamangalam?

A: Yes. Married in Kothamangalam. Since he was working in the company, I was also with him. I told him that I am going back to the native place as I am not liking it here. It was Subbu who told me you know music why should you go back to your native place? I'll get you a few tuitions here. You stay here.

Q: In Kothamangalam you mean?

A: Yes. He said be here. I can't stay without you. I agreed and he got me two tuitions in Chettiyar houses. 25rs each. I could earn 50rs a month. So I brought my family there. I started living there with my mother.

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Q: In Kothamangalam. So that's how you got the name Kothamangalam Seenu.

A: At that time, AVM made records. In 1932, I sang in those records of drama songs.

Q: Which drama songs?

A: Satyavan Savitri, Carnatic songs..

00:15:08

Q: Do you remember when this Saraswathi stores begin?

A: I think in the 30s.

Q: In Karaikudi or Madras?

A: In Madras. That is, Pondicherry Sivan Chettiyar, Narayana Iyengar, and AVM. All three of them started the recording studio. In that a German recordist..

Q: Odeon company?

A: There was a recordist called Bellas.

Q: Was he a German?

A: Yes. He was the one who recorded the songs. People like Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and all used to come and record there. Gramophone record. It was booked in AVM.

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Q: Do you remember which song?

A: Maamaruganam muruga..eno ennai..a duet from Sathyavan Savithri.

Q: Duet means you sang in both voices?

A: No no. A female singer sang the female voice.

Q: Do you remember who?

A: A girl named Krishnaveni. And one drama artiste named Saradamba. She was her daughter. She sang. So when that was happening, one day when I was in Kothamangalam, I got a cinema chance.

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Q: In what form did the cinema chance come to you?

A: There was a person called Narayana Iyer. In Poonamalle high road.

Q: I see. Mr. A. Narayanan. Of Srinivasa Cinetone?

A: He sent his people to me. To say that they are making Sakkubai and wants me to play the role of Krishna.

Q: I see. The talkies had come by then?

A: Yes it was coming. It had come I should say. In the year 1933 or 34, I think. I didn't find it suitable. I didn't go for it.

Q: I see. They called you but you didn't go. What was the reason?

A: No particular reason. I didn't feel like.

Q: You didn't feel like being part of a film?

A: Yes. The year later, in 34, original Sarangadhara was shot in Bombay.

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Q: Original Sarangadhara? Why was it called 'original'?

A: That's because Thyagaraja Bagavathar had made one Naveena Sarangadhara

Q: The one was made by K Subramanian.

A: Yes by K Subramaniam. So they wanted to make one original Sarangadhara.

Q: That was your first film?

A: Yes my very first film.

Q: Which year was this?

A: 1934 I think.

Q: Where was it shot do you remember?

A: Bombay, Wadiya Movietone.

Q: Who were your co actors in it?

A: T M Saradamba was the heroine, Sethupati Pillai who was Narendran, S P Srinivasa Iyer, myself...

Q: Who was the director?

A: Wadiya was the director

Q: Oh I see. Wadiya directed the Tamil film. But does he know Tamil?

A: He doesn't know. He writes everything in English and the translator would say from the side. There was a person called Vadivelu Naikar

Q: T C Vadivelu Naiker.

A: Yes. He was the one who wrote it and set it up.

00:18:11

Q: This Sarangadhara was a story from the Puranas? A: It is a historic story.

Q: I see, there is a character like that in History?

A: They say there was one. In my opinion, it might also be imaginary.

Q: What was the main attraction in it?

A: The main attraction was that, after looking for a bride for the son, the father himself marries the girl.

Q: That was Sarangadhara?

A: Yes. But the girl who comes as the boy's step mother wants to marry the boy. She wants to achieve what she came for. But the father wants to marry her looking at her beauty. A drama follows.

Q: That was the story of the film?

A: Yes.

00:18:52

Q: Do you remember who was the music director. For the original?

A: The music director for the original was Thuraiyur Rajagopala Sharma.

Q: Oh he was in the field by then?

A: He was working before that, in Odeon.

00:19:06

Q: You said you sang in Saraswathi stores. I wanted to clarify something. You are the best person to ask that. In Saraswathi stores, they brought in big vidwaans and did concerts and song recordings. And the drama sets that you mentioned..the person who was instrumental for all this was somebody called T G Raghavachary. This is what many people told me. He came in as Acharya the director. He was the one who took the songs of Chandralekha. You must be knowing him, he was in Gemini. Was he there then? T G Raghavachary?

A: No he wasn't there at that time. After I finished my recording sessions only the drama sessions started. I had sung songs but haven't done as drama set ups. One Mr. Abdul Khader was there then.

Q: He was the in charge there, old actor.

A: Yes, he was the in charge. He was the one who sets it up.

Q: So Raghavachary hadn't come yet?

A: No then he wasn't there. He came later.

Q: But Rajagopala Sharma was there?

A: Yes he was there.

Q: He was there as a music director?

A: Yes, he used to set up the songs.

00:20:16

Q: How successful was Sarangadhara?

A: Sarangadhara you may call it average or above average collection. Wasn't bad

Q: But it was shot in Bombay?

A: Yes in Bombay.

Q: Had it come before Naveena Sarangadhara?

A: No no it had released simultaneously. They both ran in two theatres at the same time.

Q: Why I ask you this is because, Thyagaraja Bhagavathar's first film as an actor is Pavalakkodi. That came in 1934.

A: Yes you're right

Q: S D Subbulakshmi told me in a similar programme she said Naveena Sarangadhara was shot in 1936 or 1937 in Calcutta.

A: Not 37, it was 34. End of 34. I remember it quite well. In 37, I acted in a film called Sugunavaratha shot in Imperial Studios, Bombay. So I am sure it wasn't 37.

Q: So Sarangadhara is an original story. That was the first one you did.

A: Yes.

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Q: What did you after that film?

A: After that, we did one flop film.

Q: No problem. Please tell us about it.

A: There was a Sundara Othuvar Moorthigal. He was a great singer. He sings beautifully. A film was made with a person like him called 'Pattinathar'. Dandapani Desigar did one version. Sundara Othuvar Moorthigal one version.

Q: Who made it?

A: Lotus Pictures. The same people who made Sarangadhara.

Q: Do you remember who this Lotus Pictures was?

A: A person called Kunjithapatham Iyer. After retiring from his job, he started it along with S K Ramaswamy Iyer, an engineer in Bengaluru. His son-in-law was this Kunjithapatham Iyer. He was the one who started this to make films.

Q: He started the Lotus Pictures?

A: Yes. They lived here in Gopalapuram.

Q: The company was there?

A: Yes.

Q: So just to shoot you all had to go to Bombay?

A: Yes because Wadia was directing it. The whole cost of going to Bombay, shooting it, finishing it everything put together was about 60,000 rupees. After that I acted in sound city A Narayanan's production.

00:22:25

Q: Which film was this?

A: It was Mirabai.

Q: I see Mirabai was done earlier too? By A Narayanan?

A: Yes. With an actress called Rajasundari. But the film was not successful. I did a small role in that film.

Q: Rajasundari acted as Mira in it?

A: Yes. After that in sound city we did Vipra Narayana. by A A Naidu.

Q: You acted in it.

A: Yes I did

Q: which year was it?

A: It was mid 1936 I think.

Q: You did the main role in Vipra Narayana?

A: Yes.

Q: And the devadasi..

A: Devadasi, Rajasundari only played the role. The songs were all made by Udumalai Narayana Kavigal.

Q: A Narayanan directed the film?

A: Yes.

Q: At the Poonamallee high road.

A: Yes. He then had a debrie camera which could shoot only up to 400 feet.

Q: Debrie. The magazine capacity is only 400 feet

A: Yes. But he somehow manages to do a film with that in hand.

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Q: Were the songs recorded before or..

A: No there was no playback at that time. We have to sing on the set.

Q: The artists would sit behind the camera.

A: Yes yes.

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Q: Who was the cameraman? R Prakash was there?

A: Prakash was the main cameraman, the chief.

Q: The director was A Narayanan.

A: Yes. His wife was the recordist.

Q: Meenakshi Narayanan, the sound recordist. When you talk about Rajasundari..i would like to ask you a few things. I think she is no more. M R Rajeshwari who now sings as a playback singer..

A: yes, her mother..

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Q: The Rajasundari actress at that time...was quite popularly known as the 'sex bomb'. RMK, Mr. R M Krishnaswamy told me so, the famous producer director. The Tarasasanga she acted in was..

A: Yes..

Q: He spoke excitedly about the oil applying scene. She was a good looking woman?

A: No she wasn't.

Q: Then how did she become so popular?

A: She was talented. And of course the makeup.

Q: She could sing songs?

A: Could sing enough for films. But she could do anything that is asked to do. She wouldn't hesitate.

Q: I see, she was bold enough at that time itself. She was the one who sang 'Devadevi'?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know anything about Tarasasanga?

A: I don't know much.

Q: Have you seen it?

A: No.

Q: It was very popular RMK told me. That people would watch it again and again just to see the oil applying scene.

A: Yes.

00:25:05

Q: What do you want to say after Vipra Narayana?

A: After Vipra Narayana, I went to Bombay for Sugunakartha.

Q: You started saying about Pattinathar.

A: Yes he did Pattinathar but it didn't run well.

Q: Lotus Pattinathar. What was your role in it?

A: A character called Siva dharmar.

Q: Wadiya directed that too?

A: Kunjithapatham himself did. That was the reason behind its failure. He spent so much money on the earlier film and wanted to do the next one.

Q: It is not a new thing. Even in those days such mentality existed.

A: Yes. They are the ones who wouldn't listen to anyone and don't know anything themselves.

Q: Interesting. So Pattinathar is done there. Was it shot in Bombay?

A: Yes.

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Q: You were talking about Mirabai. The one with Rajasundari by A Narayanan. Was it also a failure?

A: Yes. Was very average. Not worth mentioning.

Q: And the Suguna Sarasa..

A: It ran average. One with Orekar Films. R Padmanabha iyer. His partner Narayanasamy Mudaliar.

Q: Where did you do this Suguna Sarasa?

A: Bombay only. Imperial studios. M S Vidya was the heroine in it.

Q: And you were the hero. What was this Suguna Sarasa?

A: It was a social picture.

Q: What was it based on?

A: A college student, and his family. And the wives of two brothers. They both dislike each other. A story based on this kind of a clash.

Q: You mean family drama?

A: Yes. You can say that.

Q: I see. Was it a hit?

A: Average it was.

Q: Who was its director?

A: The director was Narayana rao Deware.

Q: Narayana rao Deware sounds like a Maharashtrian name. Was he from Bombay?

A: Yes. From Bombay.

Q: I haven't heard much about him. He was the director?

A: Yes.

Q: How was it received by the audience?

A: It ran average. In those days, there wasn't much reception for social dramas. There were some social films that released at that time. Those ran very well.

Q: Do you remember which ones were they?

A: One called Chandrakantha, Menaka, Anadai Penn..all those ran very well.

00:27:52

Q: I wanted to ask one more thing to you. You might be knowing about this. The first talkie in Tamil is known to be Kalidas. It is written everywhere and is widely known. But it is also said that the Kalidas film was multilingual. That people spoke Tamil and Telugu in it. And Hindi artists spoke in Hindi etc. So one can't call them strictly a Tamil talkie. Some people had this opinion. I haven't seen the film. Didn't get the opportunity to see it. So the first full-fledged Tamil talkie was in 1933 Galava Rishi that was shot in Bombay. B B Rangachary acted in it. T C Vadivelu Naiker directed it. Sambanda Mudaliyar's story. That was the first Tamil film. So this Galava Rishi film, you haven't seen? Have you heard of it?

A: I have only heard of it.

Q: But you have not seen the picture?

A: No.

00:28:55

Q: So after Suguna Sarasa what did you act in? 1937 you did Sugunasarasa?

A: After coming back, I did Shantha Sakku Bai.

Q: Oh, Shantha Sakku Bai! Recently, they showed on TV. Where was Shantha Sakku Bai shot?

A: Newtowne studio, here.

Q: So Newtowne studio had started by that time.

A: Yes.

Q: Whose production was it?

A: Royal talkies

Q: They were very popular then, wasn't it? Do you remember who were the people in Royal talkie?

A: One person called Narasimha Iyer.

Q: L M R Mahadevan, Subbarama Iyer..

A: Yes they were all in it. Babu Iyer was also there, he was the main chief. A merchant.

Q: Yarn merchants they were?

A: Yes. They were very noble people.

Q: They made big films of that time.

A: Yes. Great human beings. To work with and also relationship. Their conduct also.

Q: They had made this Shantha Sakku bai?

A: Yes.

00:30:12

Q: In that only, the Aswathamma..

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A: That was the drawback.

Q: What drawback?

A: The film was sailing smooth but her songs and speeches. They were lagging in length. In those days it was said it would be enjoyed and didn't listen to others. It would have been better if those portions were tightened.

Q: She was slow?

A: Very slow.

Q: Can you tell something about Aswathamma. She is a Kannada artiste isn't it?

A: Yes Kannada artist. The mania in those times was that, more than the actresses who could speak and sing in Tamil, there was an excitement bringing non-Tamil actresses in those roles.

Q: It started back then? It is still there.

A: Yes very much. Look at Santha Apte in Satyavan Savitri by Y V Rao.

00:31:10

Q: I recently saw a portion in Chintamani by Aswathamma. She is singing sitting. A Bhagavathar is introducing her. She used to be beautiful I've heard. But she isn't now.

A: She was never beautiful.

Q: Not then too?

A: No she had a long face, very tall. But good character. She had a good character.

Q: What was your role in Sakkubai.

A: I was Dhasari. Because of Dhasari only she goes to the Panduranga idol in the end. The mother-in-law hates this Dhasari character.

Q: Who all acted in it? Sarangipani was there right?

A: Sarangapani was the hero in it.

Q: Husband. Sakkubai's husband

A: Yes. Aswathamma is sakkubai.

Q: And who was the mother-in-law?

A: Pani Bai. No one can do a mother in law character like she did.

Q: She also sings?

A: Yes she used to do harikatha back then. She knew 18 languages at that time

Q: 18 languages!

A: Yes she can read and write in all those languages.

Q: Is she still alive?

A: Yes. She lives here only in the town. If you ask the All India Radio, they'll tell you.

00:32:27

Q: And the director was Sundara Rao. Do you remember the music composer?

A: Papanasam Sivan.

Q: I wanted to ask a few questions about Papanasam Sivan to you. Been thinking for a long time. Now when they make a song, they get it done with a poet. For the tune, they keep a music director and write. Papanasam Sivan does both, writing and composing. Because he is a song writer. Has done many keerthanams..

A: All the songs are his tunes only.

Q: So there will be another music director for the orchestration? A: Yes they are the in charge people.

Q: But the tunes are by him only.

A: Yes.

Q: For Sakkubai also, it was done like that?

A: Yes.

00:33:17

Q: When Sakkubai was recently shown in TV, since I have an involvement in Tamil cinema history, I don't miss them. I search for it and go and watch it. Will go to Pune also and watch them. I write down notes for them too. When I am talking to you about it...we spoke about Papanasam Sivan. He is a big vidwan. We can talk about his for hours. I remember one scene from it as I saw it recently. She takes water in a pot, she sings a song. *Varuven Kondu Thanni*. That song I felt like a Hindi tune.

A: Yes the Hindi tunes used to be copied back then. The producers, what they do is, they come to us saying it would be good to have this song in this tune. Like the song in Chintamani..

Q: Papanasam Sivan himself would do it? Won't he have objection?

A: Nothing to object here. They like it and want it that way. He does it for them.

Q: Do you know this song '*varuven*' I mentioned. Do you know where it was taken from?

A: I don't know about it.

Q: When I listened to it I felt so. I tried finding it out. So you had sung some songs in it right?

A: Yes I've done some.

Q: That is, songs by Papanasam Sivan. This Sakkubai was done in Newtowne?

A: Yes in Newtowne.

00:34:57

Q: Where did you shoot the outdoors? The portions of going to Pandaripuram etc. did you go to Pandaripuram for that?

A: In those days, they don't go to place like Pandaripuram. They erect a set here and show some temple as that temple.

Q: The outdoor that is shown in it..

A: It was shot in and around Madras. Like Thiruneermalai.

Q: So you didn't go that side, Maharashtra side?

A: No nothing. You know these illusions. The normal shots you see. They combine it with that and make. Not like today, how you go to Singapore and America to shoot there. They'll utilise a location if it suits them.

Q: Not like you go in search of places.

A: No not in those days.

00:35:51

Q: Was Sakkubai successful ?

A: Yes it was successful. It ran well.

Q: Do you remember the cameraman? Was it Jiten Banerjee?

A: Yes. Dinshaw sound.

Q: Nagoor art. Which year did it release, Sakkubai?

A: Sakkubai must be 38 or 39.

00:36:18

Q: I see. What did you do after that? After Sakkubai?

A: After Sakkubai I did Manimekalai.

Q: The one with K B Sundarambal..

A: Yes went to Calcutta with K B Sundarambal.

Q: How did Manimekalai begin? Who made it...Producer.

A: Tahsildar talkies.

Q: Because in the advertisement, it was mentioned T K productions. It was written Tahil Ram. I have the whole advertisement with me. Mentioned as having office somewhere in Purasalwakkam. The interesting point in it is that, the advertisement has your name, and other artists names..a still of N S Krishnan, the director names is not there. I searched a lot in it and couldn't find.

A: Director was M L Tandon.

Q: You were in good terms with him?

A: Yes. To an extent.

Q: Where was he from?

A: West Bengal

Q: Bengali?

A: Yes.

Q: M L Tandon, I see. Because the name sounds from that of Bombay.

A: He could be from there too.

Q: But he was brought from there. So the one who made Santhana, Vasantha classical talkies is the one who made Manimekalai.

A: They made Manimekalai

Q: Producers. What about Nandanar? Have you acted in it?

A: No I haven't

00:37:26

Q: Do you know anything about Nandanar? Acted by Sundarambal?

A: I don't know much about it.

Q: Did it run well?

A: It ran average but it wasn't as successful as the Nandanar made by Vasam.

Q: This Manimekalai is an epic subject?

A: Yes.

Q: Where was it shot?

A: In Calcutta

Q: Do you remember where?

A: There was a Tollygunge studio in Ballygunge.

Q: In Tollygunge? New Theatres?

A: No Tollygunge Studios bought off New Theatres. A rich man there bought it and ran it. He had a coal mine and all.

Q: The person who played Manimekalai was K B Sundarambal. You were in good terms with K B Sundarambal? Big singer.

A: yes.

00:38:28

Q: She was in drama in the early days. With S G Kittappa and all. Who all acted other than that in Manimekalai.

A: The famous villain actor, Veerappa

Q: P S Veerappa,

A: He played a role in it

Q: What role did he play?

A: Yatchan... Gandharvan. Husband to Kaya Chandikai. That was his first picture.

Q: For Veerappa?

A: Yes.

Q: Which year was this? Manimekalai?

A: 39 I think.

Q: So the war hadn't come to India at that time?

A: No.

Q: You could go to Calcutta and do it. You said M L Tandon was the director. It also had N S Krishnan and T A Madhuran too in it right?

A: They were both added later to the film.

Q: They were not there when you went?

A: No they weren't.

Q: I see that's interesting.

A: They made the film and wanted to do some retakes and those were done in Coimbatore studio.

Q: I see you didn't know about it

A: No I had gone to retake. Varuvathu Varattum song was retaken there. Written by Papanasam Sivan's elder brother.

Q: Rajagopala Iyer. V N Janaki's father

A: His poetry. We retook the song here in Coimbatore.

00:40:00

Q: His brother Rajagopala Iyer was just a lyricist or would he compose also like Sivan?

A: He would. He was a teacher in Tamil.

Q: He has acted in some film I've seen. But he wasn't as popular as Sivan right. But he came first to the field I've heard. After that Papanasam Sivan was brought in by K Subramaniam.

00:40:27

Q: What kind of film was Manimekalai? Bala Sanyasini..a subtitle is given with it.

A: A daughter of Madhavi. She is somebody like Avvaiyar.

Q: Dasi. Devadasi. A prince falls in love with her. Who played this prince role?

A: I only played. In the end the prince is beheaded by the people without her knowledge. The story goes like she has many boons, an akshayapatra etc. I don't remember the story well.

N Narayana Rao has also acted in it.

Q: Pulimootai Ramaswamy. All their faces are there on it.

A: They were all added later. With me, a film was made called Krishnapidaran. In Coimbatore. In those days, if a film doesn't run well, N S Krishnan comedy would be added to it.

Q: After it releases?

A: After it releases, if they see it is not running, they would add it. Some anticipate it won't run and add it in advance. N S Krishnan's market was such in those times.

00:42:03

Q: In Manimekalai a song was beautiful. 'Siraichalai'...'Sareerabhimanam Illatha'..who made these songs?

A: Siraichalai song was done by himself.

Q: How many songs did you sing in it? Do you remember?

A: I sang but in the end only one song of mine came in the film

Q: Why so?

A: Who knows. They decided to cut it off.

Q: But they recorded others?

A: Yes. 2,3 songs were taken.

Q: Where did they record those songs?

A: In Calcutta. Only one song was done here in Coimbatore.

Q: Which one was it?

A: The one in the film. Varuvathu Varattum..

Q: There is a record for it? Only that song is in the film?

A: Yes.

Q: Didn't they picturise the other songs?

A: They did but in the final they removed it.

Q: Was there any reason for that?

A: I didn't enquire about it. They must have had reasons.

00:43:32

Q: Okay how was Manimekalai received by the public?

A: It was average. Not a grand one.

Q: Even if it was a popular classic story..

A: Not that everyone in the public know about the classical story.

Q: About Manimekalai? You think that could be one reason..

A: Yes. They watched it for time pass to see just another film. They didn't know about the classical relevance.

Q: Like Kannagi..

A: I'll tell you one point. In any film, even in theatre plays, a film won't be successful if it is dependent on only one person.

Q: Correct. There is a strong point in what you say.

A: Everyone coming together in a right balance and prominence, only then a film or drama would succeed. Can't be just on one person.

00:44:40

Q: One or two may run but you can't expect everything to run like that. I agree with you. What did you do after Manimekalai?

A: After Manimekalai, Thirumangai Azhwar, Ekambavanan..

Q: Thirumangai Azhwar..Tamilnadu talkies made it right. Where was it made?

A: Here in Vel pictures studios

Q: At that time Vel pictures studios had shifted to Guindy? From Eldams road?

A: Yes

Q: Did Soundararaja Iyengar direct it? Who all were the other artistes in it?

A: Who else...K T Rukmani..

Q: The stunt actress. Can you tell me something about her?

A: She is a good woman. What else can I say?

Q: Is she a good actress?

A: Average

Q: How does she look? To do stunt you need a certain body..

A: No no. what do you think of stunt in those days? Camera does the stunt. People don't do the stunts. If Thyagaraja Bhagavathar has to climb on a horse can he do it? There are stunt doubles for all that. They wear the same dress and do it. Even for my role in Thirumangai Azhwar, they gave me a race horse. I couldn't even climb on it, I was scared. My legs were getting twisted. There was a guy called Bachu. He was the dupe for all of us. We went to Thiruvarai Thirumangai and shot.

Q: Where is it?

A: Near Mayavaram.

00:46:11

Q: What is the name of the place again?

A: Thiruvarai Thirumangai. That place only Thirumangai Azhwar robbed from God.

Q: He was a thief in the beginning.

A: Yes where he robbed off God. You can still see the peepal tree there, the one that appears in that story. The tree that is said to be the one upon which he climbed and saw, that one is still there.

Q: What did he see?

A: God coming in after getting married. So the story goes like, he notices that and jumps down to go and rob from God himself. For that portion, I had to dive from the tree and reach down. How can I do that? Bachu was called for that. He wore my costumes climbed the tree and dived down onto the sand heaped under the tree. It was a practise for them. After that they collect the money and leave.

Q: Even then there was the practise of having stunt double.

A: Of course. And people think it's me who jumped from the top.

00:47:10

Q: So K T Rukmani was one actor. You were the Thirumangai azhwar?

A: Yes. Myself.

Q: Who else were there?

A: Other small actors were part of it. Not famous people.

Q: Was there a role of Mahavishnu in it?

A: Yes one actor called M Lakshmanan. He played that role.

Q: How did the film fare?

A: It was average.

Q: Not as much as it was expected.

A: No many didn't even hear about that film. Since it was Thirumangai Azhwar, they all wore the namam on forehead and did publicity.

Q: Who Soundaraja Iyengar?

A: Yes. So what happened was once he did that, people made fun that indeed he put namam on the actors.

00:47:58

Q: You were close to Soundararaja Iyengar then?

A: Yes

Q: Was this the only film you did for him or...

A: No I did one called Bhakta Naradar.

Q: After Thirumangai azhwar what film did you do? which year did it release? I have an advertisement.

A: 1943

Q: Who was the music director for it?

A: For Thirumangai azhwar? A person called Swamy. Harmonist he was.

Q: He did everything.

A: Yes.

00:48:30

Q: You mentioned A A Somayajulu. I've read about him in old newspapers. He was a Telugu speaking person?

A: Yes Telugu.

Q: But he used to write in Tamil as well.

A: Yes.

Q: He directed films also.

A: I don't know if he directed films. But used to write dialogues that I know.

Q: What films have you worked for him?

A: Manimekalai

Q: He wrote dialogues for Manimekalai? For Vipra Narayana too?

A: Yes for both

Q: Is he still alive?

A: I am not sure. Not in touch. I have lost touch with the world totally. Not in touch with the field as well. From the 80s you may say. I am here in Adyar.

Q: You don't go outside?

A: Not anymore.

00:49:20

Q: After Thirumangai Azhwar what films did you do?

A: It was after Thirumangai Azhwar I did Suryaputhri, Kacha Devayani..

Q: Let's talk about Suryaputhri a bit. Who produced the film? Was it K Subramanyam?

A: Yes. Motion Pictures company production.

Q: Who directed it? Ellis R Dungan?

A: No. J B H Moylon. An Irishman. He was an assistant to Dungan. He was the director.

Q: I asked because an advertisement for that film came out in 1940 Narathar Dipawali malar. In that for direction, both their names were mentioned.

A: How?

Q: Moylon and Ellis R Dungan. That's why I asked

A: Not one day did Ellis R Dungan come for the shoot.

Q: You know Ellis r Dungan personally?

A: Not personally but I know him.

Q: What kind of person is he?

A: Very nice man. Very skillful.

Q: Do you know how he came to our language and made films?

A: I don't know about his history.

00:50:25

Q: what kind of film was Suryaputhri?

A: Sambatha Raja had a daughter. Sambatha Raja falls in love with Suryan's daughter.

Q: Mythology. I see.

A: Yes Puranas.

Q: What role did you play in it?

A: I was the Sambatha Raja.

Q: Who was the Suryaputhri?

A: Suryaputhri was K R Chellam.

Q: Oh K R Chellam?

A: No I am sorry it was T R Rajakumari.

Q: that's what I was wondering. Was that T R Rajakumari's first film?

A: Yes. But before this shooting was over, Kacha Devayani released.

00:51:12

Q: Why I ask you specifically is because, when we discuss further about T R Rajakumari... "there is a story that Kacha Devayani is her first film and I had brought her to act in it. When it was planned, I had gone to meet S P L Dhanalakshmi. When I went to her place, there was a girl. Dark complexion. She served us coffee. Who is this girl, good looking, is she the maid I was wondering. But she had a good figure, a photogenic face..I went to cast S P L Dhanalakshmi, but decided to cast this girl. I had someone with me then. That person told me I must be mad to cast a maid servant. He discouraged me but I asked Dhanalakshmi who was she. She said the girl was her niece, by name Rajayee. I took the girl and Haribabu said during make up test that how much ever makeup you do, this won't work on her. It is a waste of your time he said. But I insisted and made him do this and did the film Kacha Devayani", K Subramaniam is supposed to have said in an interview.

A: Is that so?

Q: It has come in a magazine. But when we searched which film came first, we found that Kumara Kulothungan it is said that T R Rajakumari had acted. There is a record for it. I've seen some advertisements of that. And this film kumara kulothungan has come before Suryaputhri and Kacha Devayani. In one it is written that her name as T RRajayee.

A: Is that so?

Q: And in a later advertisement, it is written as T R Rajalakshmi.

A: T R Rajalakshmi is a different artiste.

Q: But Rajayee..

A: That is her.

Q: And then a film called Mandharavathi.

A: That was her first film. S D Subbayya's.

00:53:19

Q: S D Subbaya and S V S Chandran. National Movietone. Why I ask you specifically this is because K Subramanyam has said like this for a magazine. I didn't get an opportunity to do a similar interview with K Subramanyam. His wife was quite familiar with S V S and when I asked her, she also said K Subramanyam was right. When I asked questions like this, she didn't know the right answers. I am wondering would K S have said because of memory loss? And about Mandharavathi when I talked to RM Krishnaswamy, at that time RMK was working as a cameraman in National Movietone. I have a cutting of that film as well. It is written that the film was directed by Marconi and T S Babu. In a lot of stills you can see Rajakumari. She is young in them. That was the first film and while shooting it in national movie tone, RMK said another story. "When we were shooting that film in national movie tone, S S Vasana regularly visited the place. He was a distributor then. He was financing films then. He had rented a place in National Movietone and was interested to enter production. I'll take this studio and we'll all work together as partnership. Chandubai was running national movie tone at that time. There was a lab chief by name Zaveri who also directed a film called Jambam."

A: Yes Jambam I remember.

Q: He just passed away 20 days ago. He lived close to my place. He said RMK was right. He said "Vasana used to come and we had discussed studio partnership details also. Who will invest money and how much etc. At one point Vasana felt

Chandubai didn't behave well. The partnership discussion was broken and then he began the Motion Pictures Producers Combine and later Gemini." He was telling maybe if that incident didn't happen Gemini would have not been born. He mentions it as an interesting incident. So the point is Mandharavathi is her first picture, which means Kacha Devayani, Suryaputhri and all came later.

A: Though it all came, the first to release was Kacha Devayani.

00:55:49

Q: Kacha Devayani was the second picture. She became popular in that.

A: Yes.

Q: You said you acted in Suryaputhri. Directed by Moylan. Does Moylan know Tamil?

A: No he doesn't

Q: How does he direct then? Who helps him?

A: Everyone. Like with me, he talks in English. I talk to him in whatever English I know. He would brief the people in English and explain what is to be done. So others execute it. Like the cameraman would set up things and do accordingly.

00:56:25

Q: Moylan came in to help in direction?

A: Direction I am not sure. He came with Duncan that much I know. Later he learnt direction, directed films and became manager at Gemini studios also

Q: That I've heard. Suryaputhri wasn't a success?

A: It ran average.

Q: Was that K Subramanyam production?

A: Yes.

00:56:51

Q: So you know nothing about Kumara Kulothungan

A: No I don't

Q: After that Kacha Devayani. That was a big success for her.

A: Yes Rajakumari did great in that role.

Q: What was special in it?

A: She walks as if she is limping.

Q: Was she challenged?

A: No it must be because she is short. So what he did was, he always gave her a pot to hold in the hip. Some or the other activity he would give. Brilliant director he was. So if something like a pot is in your hand, your walk would naturally be not normal. So it becomes justified.

00:57:35

Q: So what role did you play in it?

A: I was Kachan.

Q: She was Devayani

A: Yes.

Q: Vidwan Srinivasan acted in it. Who was he?

A: He was Harikesanallur Muthaiah Bhagavathar's disciple. He played Shukracharya role in it.

Q: Kothamangalam Subbu also acted in it?

A: Yes among the rakshasas, a character called Madanasuran. Somebody who loves Devayani

Q: Like a villain?

A: Yes. Villain means the funny one.

Q: Like a comic villain

A: Yes. All the songs in it were by Papanasam Sivan.

00:58:17

Q: Where was Kacha Devayani shot?

A: Here in Vel Pictures studio and Motion Pictures company. Recording interrupted

00:58:24

Q: We were talking about Kacha Devayani. About how T R Rajakumari was introduced. How Mandharavathi was the first one. After that Suryaputhri and Kacha Devayani both happened. Kacha Devayani released first. And Suryaputhri followed you said.

A: Yes.

Q: Music by Papanasam Sivan. You were also talking about Vidwan Srinivasan.

A: Yes. He is a vidwan did the role of Shukracharya. One thing about K Subramanyam's films is that every musician in the orchestra would be vidwaans.

Q: Everyone. Whoever plays the instruments would be vidwaans?

A: A gotuvadyam vidwan called Parthasarathy Iyengar. He used to do the music and all. Then Vittal Rao mridangam legend. He also plays Dholak. Hari Rao fiddle. Shakaram Rao's younger brother.

Q: Shakaram Rao – Semmangudi Srinivasan’s guru! Hari Rao was his younger brother?

A: Yes. A team of vidwans.

Q: You mean to say that they were all accomplished musicians, legends

A: Yes legends

01:00:08

Q: You said Kothamangalam Subbu acted as Madanasuran rakshas.

A: Yes

Q: But when I saw some old times advertisements, about Kacha Devayani, it is written that it is directed by K Subramaniam and C S V Iyer.

A: That was his uncle. Father’s younger brother.

Q: Cameraman Sambu’s father.

A: Yes.

Q: C V Ramakrishnan’s father

A: Yes.

Q: Did he co-direct the film? How did it happen?

A: Yes he would do the dialogue, rehearsals everything himself. Kunjappa..

Q: He only does it?

A: Yes. K Subramanyam will also be there. Will do everything. But kunjappa makes sure the work environment is good. How one should behave with each other etc.

Q: He is C S V Iyer. His name is kunjappa?

A: Yes that's how everyone calls him. But on direction side, sometimes he will also be present and be at a side observing. But he won't design shot or do any technical work. That they will both talk among each other and decide.

01:01:13

Q: Who was the cameraman for Kacha Devayani do you remember?

A: Kamal Ghosh

Q: I see Kamal Ghosh was the cameraman. Where were the outdoors for Kacha Devayani done? All inside studio?

A: Yes we didn't go outdoor at all.

Q: Didn't go to any location

A: No

01:01:37

Q: When we talk about Kacha Devayani, I've seen it as a child. I only remember a few shots from it. It was a sexy film for the standards of that time. It is said so. K Subramanyam and S V S also have told me this. What do you think of this? You were the hero in it..

A: It is not sexy at all.

Q: Then how did it get that name?

A: Why it got that is because, the hero and heroine hold the hanging roots of a banyan tree and dance in joy. When they do that, their bodies have to touch each other. Immediately it was branded as a sexual film.

Q: Is that the sexy tag?

A: Yes. That's how they call a film sexy. Nothing else is there.

Q: One more thing was that, Rajakumari after taking bath, when she was returning holding a pot, I've shot it a bit sexier said K Subramaniam.

A: That is not there in the film

Q: I see. It's not there?

A: Also, is carrying a pot sexy?

Q: No she was wet after taking bath

A: Let it be. It wasn't vulgar.

Q: Was there any bathing scene in it?

A: No it wasn't there. There is a shot of her sitting by the water. That's all.

Q: There was no bathing scene..

A: No sir. There is nothing like that in it.

Q: But it got such a name.

A: I've also got a letter from Ceylon. Have you married Rajakumari? Are you both in love? If you are not planning to marry, I am willing to marry her. A man wrote to me.

Q: Such a fan

A: Such a fan! If you talk about those days, if the hero touches the heroine, it becomes the talk of the town.

Q: I see people don't touch in love films

A: No they don't

Q: Not like how they hug these days

A: No no can't even imagine. Now a heroine comes, a hero hugs her. Are they not touching each other? Are people discussing her chastity?

Q: No one claims that these days. Those days it wasn't like that.

A: No it wasn't.

Q: In Kacha Devayani, upon the elephant..

A: She is sitting in the front, I am behind her. What is so sexual about it?

Q: So it wasn't a sexy film..but after that only Rajakumari was known as dream girl, girl of the dreams..

A: They all started imagining it that way. What can we do about it. She happened to be more photogenic than other actresses of that time. Her body form was such. So it was pleasing for people

Q: Dream girl. Sexy figure she had? A good face, good body, an attractive personality..

A: Yes that's why Vasanth had also booked her for Chandralekha after Kacha Devayani.

01:04:48

Q: Kacha Devayani was a successful film wasn't it?

A: Very well. It ran very well. It overtook Shakuntalai. M S Subbulakshmi's Shakuntalai.

Q: Is it? Both released together?

A: When they both ran together in the same place in two different theatres, if you compare the collection, Kacha Devayani was higher

01:05:14

Q: A bigger box office success than Shakuntalai. What have you done after Kacha Devayani? Were any songs popular in Kacha Devayani that you had sung? How many songs have you sung in Kacha Devayani?

A: I've sung 7 or 8 in it

Q: Totally how many songs in it? So many songs would be there in films in those days.

A: A song in the beginning, then a duet..

Q: Do you remember the duet? Duet means with Rajakumari?

A: Yes with Rajakumari.

Q: She sings in her own voice right..good singer she is.

A: Yes..'ethuvanthal enna enna'

Q: Yes I remember this song.

A: 'ivvulaka sinthana ethu?' I have even forgotten the songs now.

Q: But you still sing so well

A: The opening song itself was in a varnam in raag Pantuvarali.

Q: Papanasam Sivan?

A: Yes.

Q: Which varnam was it?

A: 'boomi' (sings a few lines)

Q: you've sung this song..

A: yes. (sings a few lines)

01:06:58

Q: Where was this recorded?

A: All of them were in the studio here.

Q: Who was the recordist do you remember?

A: The recordist was that boy..

Q: Biggs?

A: Biggs..not Biggs..I don't remember the name..

01:07:21

Q: You don't remember the name. after Kacha Devayani which film did you do?

A: Krishnapidaran

Q: Whose film was Krishnapidaran?

A: C V Raman's film. Chogamelar..

Q: Chogamelar. Both you did?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they separate films or came together?

A: Separate

Q: What kind of film was Krishna Pidaran?

A: It was Bhima's ego story. The Pidaran bursts his ego.

Q: Pidaran means snake charmer?

A: Yes. Like a snake charmer.

Q: Was it a story from Mahabharata or an imaginary one?

A: It is a story from Mahabharata

Q: Which role did you play in it?

A: I played Arjunan.

Q: Oh I see you played Arjunan

A: Yes it is also his ego story

Q: Who played Bheema in it?

A: Bheema was Dhansingh.

Q: C S Dhansingh. He would be well built like a Bheema?

A: Yes

Q: Who played Krishna?

A: Vaikom Vasu

Q: An actor by name Vaikom Vasu. Ok. Where was this shot? In Kandar studios?

A: Yes.

01:08:42

Q: Was this C V Raman's own production? A Narayanan's brother. He was an advocate right before that?

A: Yes BA LLB

Q: He puts it along with his name. I've seen it in the advertisements. He is in cinema for a long time?

A: Yes.

Q: He has come the same way of A Narayanan. He was the director..

A: Yes

Q: Who was the music director for Krishnapidaramn? Papanasam Sivan?

A: No. the music director was G Ramanathan's elder brother Sundara bhagavathar.

Q: I see his elder brother was a music director too?

A: No he wasn't a music director. He was a music composer. Music direction was taken care of by G Ramanathan.

Q: Orchestrations and all

A: Yes

Q: Tunes are composed by his brother?

A: No tunes are also composed by G Ramanathan only

Q: Then?

A: The lyrics were by his brother. Ramanathan composes the tunes, his brother writes the songs.

Q: Lyrics. Poetry. I see. What was his name again? Sundara Bhagavathar?

A: Yes.

Q: Was he active in cinema?

A: Yes. He was for a while and then disappeared.

01:09:49

Q: Did Krishna Pidaran run well?

A: It was average. That's why they added the N S Krishnan's portions.

Q: After it was released?

A: Yes.

Q: That means after the film released, it wasn't running well. Then his portions were added. And released it again.

A: Yes.

Q: N S Krishnan had that kind of value.

A: Yes

Q: I've heard many films to have done this.

A: After that Chogamelar

01:10:13

Q: What kind of film was it?

A: It was a mythological subject. Bhagavatham.

Q: Chogamelar was name of a character?

A: Choga is the name of a person who was a barber. An ardent devotee like Nandanar..

Q: An untouchable person but devotee.

A: So he sits with God and eats. God comes to his home and eats.

Q: At the barber's house?

A: Yes.

Q: Like Bhakta Chetha

A: Yes correct. Like how he was a cobbler in that film, here he is a barber.

Q: Who made that film, Chogamelar?

A: C V Ramaswamy.

Q: Oh both were by him. Was this too shot in Central Studios?

A: For that it was Govindaraja Naidu. Passed away

Q: Music director?

A: Yes.

Q: Which role did you do in Chogamelar?

A: Chogamelar.

Q: You were the hero

A: Yes.

01:11:16

Q: Who were the other artistes in it?

A: Ranganayaki was the heroine.

Q: Ranganayaki? I've heard that name. Who was she?

A: She was there in Chintamani too

Q: Chintamani? Do you know where is she from?

A: Some place nearby

Q: To Madras?

A: Yes.

Q: Is she alive? No?

A: Yes she is. Lives in Nungambakkam

Q: Has she done many films?

A: She is mother-in-law of M A Majeed

Q: This Ranganayaki? I see. What role did she play in it?

A: She was the heroine

Q: This Chogamelar's wife? Do you remember other artists in it?

A: I don't remember.

01:11:58

Q: Was G Ramanathan music for it too? No. Govindaraja Naidu you said. This too was done in Coimbatore

A: Yes

Q: Which year was this?

A: 1942.

Q: You had come to Gemini we spoke about it.

A: Yes I had come to Gemini by then. But that thing had started by then

Q: What? Evacuation?

A: Yes. For evacuation I went to Karaikudi

Q: When the Chogamelar was shot, it was done in Coimbatore right?

A: Yes. I go to Coimbatore only for the film purpose.

Q: So your family and others

A: All would be in Madras. In Purasalwakkam.

01:12:43

Q: You were married by then

A: Yes.

Q: When did you get married?

A: In 32 I got married even before I came to Madras

Q: According to that time's norm, you got married when you were very young.

A: I was 22 when I got married

Q: So Chogamelar is over. When did you come to Gemini?

A: Around the same time

Q: Must be 42?

A: Yes 42.

01:13:09

Q: Dasi Aparanji. Gemini productions. That was your first with them. Can you tell me something about this film? Who all acted in it? Pushpavalli..

A: Yes Pushpavalli was there. M K Radha, hero.

Q: Dasi Aparanji was Pushpavalli?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was M K Radha in it? Vikramadityan?

A: Yes he played Vikramadityan. Main story was about her. About Dasi Aparanji. In that Kothamangalam Subbu...



ntai

Q: He was the comedian

A: Yes. An actor called Vasu as a temple priest, Sundari Bai and myself

Q: Who was vasu?

A: L Narayana Rao..

Q: What role did he play

A: He played the mama to Dasi Aparanji

Q: You mean pimp. You mentioned a name Vasu. Was he an actor?

A: No he wasn't. He acted in it. Did very naturally.

Q: What was natural acting like?

A: He comes as an advisor to the temple priest.

Q: What role did you play in Dasi Aparanji?

A: I was the Chettiyar. A foolish rich man. He gets cheated

Q: By Aparanji?

A: Yes.

01:14:24

Q: Did you have songs in the film?

A: Oh yes.

Q: As in you sang in it? The Chettiyar character sings in the film?

A: Yes it's a duet. Like how she gets money from me. So a song as if she is seducing me into it. She asks me why I didn't come the previous day. This fool says he is

scared of his father. Narayana Rao makes fun of me for behaving so. He has funny dialogues.

This Chettiyar character says he would give 10000 gold coins if they come when the father is not around. He is lured by this girl in the film. 'Aasai Kollathavan..' (sings a few lines)... a song I sang describing her beauty

Q: You sang this song. who composed the music?

A: It was me and M D Parthasarathy

Q: M D Parthasarathy was the permanent music director there?

A: Yes permanent music director. I gave the idea let us do the ragamalika. Kothamangalam Subbu wrote the lyrics for it.

01:16:57

Q: S Rajeshwara Rao has come by then?

A: He was there. He was permanent there

Q: Did he do anything for this?

A: No he didn't do anything for this film. He made that song for me. He made it in Sindhu Bhairavi ragam.

Q: Full song?

A: Yes full song. but it wasn't very satisfactory for me. Even Parthasarathy didn't feel impressed. He also wanted to try something different. So I tried this tune and sang it once. He said okay.

Q: Who was the director for Dasi Aparanji?

A: B N Rao

01:17:29

Q: Yes it released in name of B N Rao. He also claims he has done it but when I was talking to A K Shekhar many years back, “Dasi Aparanji is practically the work of Ramnath”, he said. Is it true?

A: It is true.

Q: In what circumstance did that happen?

A: The whole film was completed under B N Rao. Even edited. Ramnath saw it. He was the executive there.

Q: He was a Production executive?

A: Yes. He was the chief cameraman and the executive

Q: Both?

A: Yes. Nothing happens without consulting him. He had that kind of power. He screened the film and saw. By the way where is Seenu in this? Is this why I give you money to make the film? You have such a great singer-actor with you and you don't utilise him. Is this why I give you money..what story have you made?

Q: He said so?

A: Yes. Saying so, he reshot it

Q: Completely?

A: Yes. Almost. Wherever I had to come, those portions. he made my role much bigger in the film.

Q: Your portions were entirely reshot

A: Yes.

Q: That reshooting was done by Ramnath?

A: Yes.

Q: He directed it?

A: Yes. He understood where all what all is needed to edit the film and make it better. He did it himself. So the direction part was first done by B N Rao. He left after his job was done.

Ramnath took things in hand and fixed it himself.

01:19:03

Q: Who was the cameraman in the beginning? V S Ranga?

A: Yes

Q: So when Ramnath shot it he took it himself?

A: Yes.

Q: Ranga wasn't there

A: No

Q: Beginning V S Ranga when it was B N Rao?

A: Yes

Q: You said you sang a duet with Pushpavalli. Do you remember which one?

A: Playback was sung by T V Rathnam "Entha naalum piriyeen..." (sings a few lines)

Q: This one was you and T V Rathnam

A: Yes.

Q: This is also M D Parthasarathy's tune

A: It was by one Gnana Vaidyanatha Iyer.

Q: I've heard his name who was he? Music director?

A: He was not a music director. This was his lyrics. He did the tune. But the whole setup and orchestration by M D Parthasarathy.

Q: He was in Gemini? Gnana Vaidyanathan?

A: No he was brought it specially for this by Vasam.

01:21:22

Q: When we talk about Dasi Aparanji, people have told me that it was a bit vulgar. I didn't get the chance to watch it. What is your opinion about it?

A: Vulgar were some of its dialogues.

Q: How was it so?

A: It means. The temple priest dreams about this girl Aparanji. He is bathing in the pond with Subbu and he tells him 'ah even if it was dreams, it was nothing short of pleasure'. To be noted, they were all Subbu dialogues. Aparanji is bathing in the nearby pond. She comes running. She holds him and asks for 1000 gold coins. He asks why and she says didn't you dream about me? You did get pleasure. Give me 1000 coins. Her pimp is returning from somewhere and notices this fight happening. He asks what happened and the men say how ridiculous is to ask for money to dream about someone. The pimp says if all you men start only dreaming about her, how will we run our business?

Q: (laughs) He had a punch line there

A: Yes.

Q: All these were written by Subbu?

A: No Narayana Rao's own lines. Vasam had a great laugh while shooting it. When we were shooting in Thiruvanmiyur

Q: It was shot in Thiruvanmiyur pond?

A: Yes. So the film had many such punches. That would have come across as vulgar. But none of the scenes visually had any vulgar thing. Not even in love scenes.

01:23:25

Q: They also tell another thing. That the Pushpavalli who acted as Aparanji, wore dresses that were sexy for that day's standards. People were not ready to accept it then. That's why it didn't run, said some friends of mine who work in Gemini. Was it correct?

A: No. She wore nothing that was revealing in it. Where does it come as sexy? There is one song 'aasaya'... (sings a few lines)... those lines would have come across as sexy. Her introduction song was a dance 'mugathai mugathai' (sings a few lines)

Q: The words are suggestive. This was perceived as vulgar by people

A: That was their way of looking at it. Even in padam (sings a few lines) it has words like these

Q: Some Jaawalis would have lines like that too. Openly suggestive.

A: That too there was a writer called Subrama kavi. His lines would be very vulgar.

01:25:58

Q: Ramnath's photography in it was very good, the technicians of that times said. He increased your role and made it good.

A: Yes. That film changed my life. I wasn't there in it

Q: You got a lift with that film.

A: Yes. Surely.

Q: How was the public reception for Dasi Aparanji?

A: It was received well. Ran well collected well and the songs were superhit. All the songs were classics

Q: M D Parthasarathy's

A: Yes. And it cannot be recreated.

Q: Why is that so?

A: It was classical based. Not a light music anyone can repeat. It is best enjoyed listening.

Q: That's true.

A: Most of the songs in my films cannot be recreated. Hardly 10 people could. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar's songs could be sung by many, not mine. Only people with deep knowledge in music can sing them. Only the ones with the knack of remembering the notes can reproduce it.

Q: You mean the common man can't sing them

A: See Thyagaraja Bhagavathar has also sung classical songs. Recording interrupted

01:27:30

Q: You were saying about Dasi Aparanji and about your songs. How they could only be sung by people who are well versed in music unlike that of Thyagaraja Bhagavathar's songs that could also be sung by common men. That's how if he has 100 hits, you would have 10. 1:10 ratio you said.

A: Yes.

Q: When we talk about Gemini, you were good friends with Ramnath?

A: Yes

Q: You knew him from before?

A: No only after coming to Gemini.

Q: After coming to Gemini and working for Dasi Aparanji, you became friends with him A: Yes

Q: Do you remember any stories from the sets of Dasi Aparanji about Ramnath?

A: When you ask about memories..

Q: I mean you may say about the man, his nature, personality..

A: He is a great man. Wishes good for everyone. He feels everyone should get their due. I'll give you an example. During the evacuation times, during the war times, the rates shot up for everything in the market. When that happened, Vasam felt like giving increment to everyone.

Q: In salary

A: Yes. Because there was inflation. He thought I am getting money, these people should also get. What to give he thought. Ramnath being the executive, Vasam consulted him. Ramnath could have said "ok increase it by 10 rupees". But he didn't say so. He wanted to give 25 paise for every 1 rupee. Whoever is getting 100 rupees must be given 125.

Q: 25% increase

A: Increased yes. Same day he approved it and it took two days for them to arrange for it. In the meanwhile, the permanent artists started fearing if they were getting laid off. It was evacuation time, very unpredictable. But to their surprise everyone got a 25% hike. This he did voluntarily. No one asked for it. Such is the character. When Vasam felt so, Ramnath, the executive supported the decision and didn't advise him otherwise.

I see.

01:30:17

Q: Do you remember or want to say something about Ramnath as a technician. During the shoot of Dasi Aparanji or something.

A: I don't have that much technical knowledge but everyone talks about his technical skills in high regard. I've heard people saying if Ramnath takes a shot, it would be at par with the shots taken in Hollywood. I've heard these things.

01:30:46

Q: Were you good friends with A K Shekhar?

A: He was very talented. Plays flute too.

Q: Who, A K Shekhar?

A: Yes. He has good knowledge in music

Q: I didn't know that fact. When did you first meet Vasam?

A: I met Vasam when we were doing Dasi Aparanji only.

Q: You haven't met him before. Then how did your friendship grow?

A: I've seen him with Subbu some times.

Q: Where do you go with Subbu?

A: He was working there permanently.

Q: Permanent where, in Gemini?

A: Yes. So whenever I go with him to the studio, Vasam would be there. I'll meet him, talk. He knows me from before. Have heard it from Subbu.

Q: Would you like to tell something about him?

A: According to me, he is a highly revered man. Of great respect. A great personality.

Q: Why would you say so?

A: As I mentioned earlier, the good deeds he would do. And more than that, the quality to forgive others.

Q: Who's, Vasana's?

A: Yes. I once had said yes for a concert in Bengaluru.

Q: When you were doing Dasi Aparanji?

A: Yes. Same period. That was committed a month back. And the one who was organising it was a very poor man. He had sold things from his home to do the publicity.

Q: You had done music concerts a lot back then?

A: Yes I have done. I also gained cinema stardom by then. So it was an attraction. So when this concert was fixed, I was telling Vasana I want to go for it. He said I am getting Ramnath to do the retakes. If you go now, how can things be? Ask him to postpone the concert by a week. I said it would be impossible for that person to postpone his programmes. If I don't turn up, he would go hiding with his family. He would be ruined, has trusted me fully on this. I have to go. Ramnath said I can't take the responsibility of this, you have to manage it on your own. I said okay then I am going and started removing the dress I was wearing.

Q: On the set?

A: Yes. I had to leave the same day for it. I removed the dress, took out the fake moustache that was stuck on my face and walked straight into the make up room. Vasana came at that point. Any big producer in his position wouldn't take that kind of an insult. He asked me 'why Seenu? Where are you going? Are you going

to change your make up? Is the shooting over?' I said I am not being respected for my choices and decided to leave. He said 'you foolish guy. Why is this a big issue? You are going, fine. Tell me when would you be back.' I said Monday I'll be back for the shooting. Sunday the concert would be over and I'll take a Monday train back. He said "ask the production to give you a car. Tell them I asked them to. Go home, take bath, eat and then take the train. When you come back by the train, I'll send a car to the station. You can straight come here, need not go home." Which producer would do this?

Q: Vasan said so?

A: Yes. I had tears in my eyes. I thought he was going to shout at me for spoiling his production plans.

Q: He reacted otherwise.

A: Yes. That kind of a great personality he was. Everyone should be good in their lives. That was his motto. Only people close to him understand that.

01:35:14

Q: When you were in Gemini during the Aparanji period, who were all there as chief technicians? Ramnath was there, Shekhar was there. M D Parthasarathy was there, Rajeshwar, Subbu were there. Who else were there? What else were they shooting other than aparanji?

A: Nandanar was not finished. They were shooting Mangamma Sabatham.

Q: T G Raghavanchari and Vasundhara devi. Did you do anything in it?

A: No I didn't

Q: They were shooting simultaneously?

A: Yes. That would be going on one side

Q: You knew Raghavanchari well?

A: I know him.

Q: Not that you are close to him so that you can tell anything about him

A: No I don't know him that well

Q: You knew Vasundhara?

A: I've met her and spoken to her but have no relation.

Q: You didn't get the opportunity to spend time with her

A: No I didn't

01:36:07

Q: In Mangamma Sabatham, N S Krishnan and T A madharam were there. Were they good friends of yours?

A: Yes we know each other well.

Q: Have you done any film with them before that?

A: In Krishna Pidan.

Q: That you said was stuck later to the film.

A: Yes. Still I knew them quite well. They were in the company, in the dramas.

Q: Did you know N S Krishnan from your theatre days?

A: Yes I knew him from our theatre days.

Q: Can you share something about N S Krishnan?

A: Again a great personality. What else to say. People say so many things about him. Good and bad. I would say he was a great man. Because I don't see a point in

unnecessarily gossiping about anybody. He is an intelligent man, a great personality. That's all

Q: In short, in essence you said about him

A: Yes. Same with Madhuras. She was the generous type. If he feels like giving 10, she gives 20.

Q: Very generous

A: Yes

Q: Charitable nature.

A: I don't know about charities but she was generous.

01:37:39

Q: What did you do after Dasi Aparanji?

A: Ekambavanan.

Q: You said you acted in Bhakta Naradar. It would be before this right? Before Dasi Aparanji. Soundaraja Iyengar made it With Ranjan Balachandar and Kumari Rukmani

A: Yes.

Q: That was also shot in Gemini

A: Yes.

Q: What role did you play in it?

A: Brahma

Q: As Lord Brahma

A: Yes. You need to be father of Narada. I was Brahma and M S Vijaya was Saraswati

Q: Was it a big role in it? Of Brahma?

A: A couple of scenes and a song.

Q: Ranjan acted as Naradar in it

A: Yes

Q: And S Balachandar as young Naradar

A: Yes. Pattu Iyer also acted

Q: What role did Pattu Iyer play in it?

A: He was the guru. For Naradar. Also L Narayanarao acted

Q: What role did he play in it?

A: He was the one who gives education and all to Narada. There is an objection that Narada shouldn't be wearing the sacred thread.

Q: Why so?

A: Because he was an illegitimate child. She is born as a Dasi.

Q: Who, Saraswati? Was it a curse?

A: Yes. Her son learns and excels in Sanskrit and Vedas. So he argues why shouldn't he be given the sacred thread. People around him argue it shouldn't be given to him. He finally decides to give it to him and shows the Sun chanting Gayathri mantras.

Q: Who, Pattu Iyer?

A: No Narayana Rao. A song comes there. 'ksheera sagara..'

Q: Who sang it?

A: M D Parthasarathy sung it for him

Q: As a playback

A: Yes. In the film. It wasn't a lip sync song. plays in the background.

Q: M D Parthasarathy was the music director for that film?

A: Yes

Q: It was also shot in Gemini, Soundarraja Iyengar production

A: Yes.

Q: Direction was Soundarraja Iyengar?

A: Yes.

01:40:23

Q: Do you remember which year was it? 40,41? Dasi Aparanji was 42.

A: Yes after finishing Manimekalai in 39 I came here. It must be 40.

Q: Did you do any other film in Gemini then?

A: No

Q: Usually in Gemini, people were employed on monthly salary basis right?

A: Not everyone. Only some.

Q: How were you kept?

A: On project basis

Q: Not on monthly basis

A: No.

01:41:19

Q: When we talk about remuneration, how was the payment for the artists in those days?

A: Was very average

Q: For example an artist of your stature, how was your payment like in those days?

A: Maximum would be 10,000

Q: 10,000 rupees per picture?

A: Yes.

Q: Which film did you get paid like that?

A: Ekambavanan

Q: Mahatma Udhangar was more than that

A: Yes you mentioned, you got 20,000

Q: For Dasi Aparanji?

A: Maximum would be 5000

Q: But rupee had high value back then? How much was a sovereign? Rupees 20, perhaps?

A: No, 75 rupees.

Q: Oh, now it is over 4,000 rupees.

A: Yes. It had high value. I acted in a film called Thulasi Jalandaran

01:42:14

Q: Thulasi Jalandaran. Whose film was this?

A: Raja Rajeshwari pictures, Kannamba.

Q: Pasupaleti Kannamba. It was her own production?

A: Yes

Q: P U Chinnappa and herself acted in it

A: Yes.

Q: Was it a mythological story, Thulasi Jalandaran?

A: Yes

Q: What type of story was it?

A: Jalandarasuran was an asuran.

Q: Rakshasa?

A: Yes. A girl called Brinda wants to marry him

Q: Who was Brinda?

A: Some girl. He is a bad guy, the Jalandarasuran. So Narathan tells her don't worry, just be devoted to Narayana and he will take care of everything.

Q: What role did you play in it?

A: I played Narathan.

01:43:10

Q: What role did P U Chinnappa play in it?

A: He was Jalandarasuran.

Q: And Brinda was Kannamba?

A: Yes.

Q: Who directed it, Nagabhooshanam?

A: Yes Nagabhooshanam

Q: Where did they shoot it?

A: Gemini.

Q: Yes. They shoot in that fashion, of partnership. Narada means there would be songs.

A: Yes it had many songs. There was a vritham that is like an advise to her. While going to him, one song. It should sound like praising but he shouldn't worship him. A song that is a tricky one.

01:43:56

Q: Who did the music for that film?

A: M D Partharathy.

Q: I see it was pretty much like a Gemini production. Who wrote the lyrics back then?

A: Sivan.

Q: Papanasam Sivan writes it. Who does the tune?

A: Sivan writes it along with a tune. The music director would do the orchestration and arrangement for it

Q: So any song he gives, he tells how it should be sung too?

A: Yes. He would show it

Q: Because he has a good knowledge in music..

A: He is a legend, isn't it.

01:44:29

Q: Did this Thulasi Jalandaran run well?

A: It ran well. Good film.

Q: Somebody said a print of the film is in Bengaluru. So for the National Film Archives purpose, me and my friends are searching for it. Heard it is in Bengaluru. So if we could get it,

A: Yes you may play it on TV

Q: Yes. Attempts are being made. I have not seen it.

A: The locations in it were good. We went to Andhra and shot at those places. In Thiruneermalai, I sing one song in a location

Q: Playback had come by then?

A: Yes. It had come.

01:45:12

Q: Do you remember the first song you sang on playback?

A: In Krishna Pidan

Q: I see, it came in Krishna Pidan only.

A: Even before that. Kacha Devayani and before that. They were playbacks.

Q: In Kacha Devayani too?

A: Yes. Also in Shantha Sakkubai.

Q: So you would play it and then move your lips accordingly.

A: Yes.

01:45:44

Q: What did you do after Thulasi Jalandaran?

A: It was after Thulasi Jalandaran, I did Ekambavanan.

Q: Ekambavanan. Would it be 47?

A: It was 47. Two films that year. Ekambavanan and Mahatma Udhangar.

Q: What kind of story was Ekambavanan?

A: A sishya of Kambar. Vanan.

Q: He is a poet?

A: Yes poet. A king. Another fellow student, a girl, is being targeted by Chera, Chozha and Pandya kings to marry her. A princess like that.

Q: Who played that?

A: P A Periyanyaki. What a great songs.

Q: She is still alive.

A: Yes. So in the story the Vanan goes to Ekan.

Q: Who is Ekan?

A: He is a person from the lower caste

Q: Who was that?

A: He was their gatekeeper. For the family. Their family loves him as he is a very loyal and sincere worker.

Q: Harijan

A: Yes. He dies in the film and Vanan who is the sishya of Kamban wants to keep his name alive. So he changes his names to Ekan-Kamba-Vanan. Ekambavanan.

Q: So a man was actually there by the name

A: Yes a sishya of Kamban

Q: What role did you play in it?

A: Ekambavanan's role. Vanan

Q: Who played the roles of the 3 kings who want to marry her?

A: The three of them get jailed in the film

Q: Who played those roles do you remember?

A: S V Subbaiah

Q: The character actor. He had come then?

A: Yes. He came first in that

Q: In Ekambavanan

A: Yes. He has nothing significant to do in the film. They all come say their lines, get arrested and then released. That's all.

Q: Other actors?

A: Small actors

01:48:11

Q: Who produced Ekambavanan? C V Raman?

A: Thanjavur Ramanatha Chettiyar - Rao Bahadur Ramanathan, Saravanabhava Pictures it was called.

Q: Saravanabhava Pictures?

A: It was located here in Oliver road.

Q: Who was the director of the film?

A: BN Rao

Q: Was that the last film he did before going abroad? He went to Japan, Hong Kong or somewhere he made films for shaw brothers.

A: Yes he finished Ekambavanan and went there.

Q: Who was the music director for that film?

A: G Ramanathan

Q: This is one of the good films of P A Periyannayagi? She has done small roles in films like Sathyabhama

A: She has done well

Q: Did Ekambavanan run well?

A: I don't know much about it. Average only I think

Q: Where did you shoot this?

A: That was in Newtowne.

Q: That was Jiten Banerjee, Nagoor, Dinshaw team

A: Yes. I've even fought with Nagoor in the studio

01:49:24

Q: Why what happened?

A: Everything has been arranged for the shoot. The set has been constructed but the set is all wet. The director was asking why it is wet. Chettiyar was clueless. I looked around and found Nagoor. I called him and said 'you are not doing your duty well. When will it dry and when will we shoot. When do we finish and go

home why are you doing like this.' I was upset with him. He said 'what can we do, we worked till late and it is still drying. We'll put the fans on to dry and you can consider shooting the next day. What can I do about it? It has to dry. I can't go and blow it dry right.' I argued. It wasn't a fight but a friendly argument.

01:50:32

Q: Like how advocates fight. You mentioned Mahatma Udhangar. Whose production was it?

A: That was the T P Sundaram's production.

Q: Later he made Baghdad Thirudan with MGR, Vaijyanthi Mala

A: Yes.

Q: He directed it himself. Is he still alive?

A: He must be

Q: You are not in touch

A: That's what I told you. After 60, I lost touch with everyone in cinema.

Q: This Mahatma Udhangar is a mythological film?

A: Yes. For Dharmaraja..

Q: I see Mahabharatha.

A: Mahabharatha. They describe about the specialities of guru bhakti.

Somebody advises Dharmar about Guru bhakti. Udhangar is the one who decides to get rid of all snakes from the Raja's kingdom.

Q: Pareekshit Raja?

A: The story is being told to Pareekshit Raja. Udhangar did so. Krishna appears and tells him one should spread devotion in the world and not decide there shouldn't be snakes at all in the world.

Q: What was his anger on snakes?

A: A raja had kavachakundalam. Udhangar is sishya of a guru. After he finishes his education, before leaving, he asks what he needs as guru dakshina. The guru's wife says she wants the kavacha kundala of the raja. "I want a replica if not the original". He agrees. There are two stories in it. He goes to get the kavacha kundalam. Anjali devi comes as a Mohini in the film as sent by Kubera to get the kavacha kundalam. She comes to somehow take it from Udhangar when he gets away with it. Udhangar is always a devotee Lord Shiva. He finishes his sandhyavanthanam and comes. She dances to seduce him so that she can take the kavachakundalam away. Him being a devotee of Shiva, feels everyone to be a manifestation of Shiva. When she comes, he thinks it is lord Shiva. She comes dancing around him and slowly comes close. And at that time, the water in the kamandalam spills. So this water that spills on her legs turns her into an ugly deformed woman. She asks for forgiveness and Udhangar says "which lord Shiva turned you ugly would turn you back into yourself". In the end the kavachakundalam is taken by another damsel. So T R Ramachandra...

Q: Which role did T R Ramachandra play in it?

A: A fellow sishya to Udhangar.

Q: Like a comedian

A: Yes. Comes along with him. Snakes crawl all over him and at that moment, the naga damsel takes the kavacha kundalam and goes back to her nether kingdom. Udhangar gets to know what happened and finds a snake's burrow. He breaks it open with his legs. That opens up and he goes inside. When he goes inside, the princess acts like falling in love with him. He tells the Nagaraja that it is not fair as this is meant for his guru. He refuses. Then he prays to the Agni God. He had a boon from Agni that he would be present whenever he wishes for. As he once protected the Agni when there was a flood. He uses the boon in the Naga world.

There was a song there. Smoke fills up the place and the Nagaraja feels uncomfortable. He screams. He asks for forgiveness and returns the kavacha kundalam to him.

01:56:13

Q: Who played the role of the snake damsel?

A: K R Chellam.

Q: She was a heroine first? She is still alive I think

A: Yes. Her daughter is a doctor.

Q: K R Chellam and you are good friends?

A: Yes

Q: What all films have you worked with her other than this?

A: I think...

Recording interrupted

01:56:39

Q: Yesterday when we were talking, we reached till Mahatma Udhagar. You said the story. When in 1947 did the film come do you remember?

A: End of 47

Q: That was Pattu Iyer. Was that his first film?

A: In his direction I think.. that must be his first.

Q: Before that he was supposed to direct a film.

A: That was stopped midway. It got burnt

Q: The negatives caught fire, he once said

A: Yes

Q: So Mahatma Udhagar was the film that came out first in his name.

A: Yes

Q: Was he in Gemini then, no?

A: No

Q: He joined later

A: Yes

Q: When he did Apoorva Sagotharagal

A: Yes.

01:57:32

Q: Where was Mahatma Udhagar shot?

A: Shobhanachala studio. We first went to Bombay. And planned to do it Vishnu Cinetone. In centre of Bombay. But they didn't have any facility for makeup and costumes. It was inconvenient. They charged a very big amount too. So we all discussed and came to a conclusion that it is better to go back to Madras and finish the film. We'll end up spending a lot otherwise. With this money, we could buy a bungalow and shoot it there.

Q: You get a bungalow for 12000 in 1947?

A: Yes. So we packed up and came back to Madras. We came and realised we need a studio. The Shobhanakala studio was an ordinary one. Some equipment was needed for the studio. Sundaram bought them all and had a special cameraman. Rahman was the cameraman for the film.

Q: Senior cameraman Rahman

A: Yes. So he arranged for everything. Bought all lights and grips

Q: Before that they were not there?

A: It had but not sophisticated ones.

Q: Studio was there?

A: Yes but it didn't have facilities. So we arranged everything and did it.

Q: Completely shot there?

A: Yes completely done there

01:59:20

Q: Udhagar had any outdoor scenes?

A: It had a lot.

Q: Where did you shoot them all?

A: All nearby. Crossing Tambaram.

Q: You didn't go far

A: No everything within the reach of Madras.

Q: There was no trend back then like going to Kashmir or other places

A: No no

01:59:41

Q: How was Mahatma Udhagar received by the audience?

A: It ran average. It was an action film.

Q: But the name doesn't suggest that

A: Yes. It was a good film though. It was shot very well. The camera work.

It was first released here in Chithra talkies. And they opened one called Star talkies. This was the first film to be shown there. That much I know. How the film fared I don't think about or bother about.

02:00:29

Q: Before Mahatma Udhangar, you said you acted in a film called Ponnaruvi.

A: Yes.

Q: What is this film?

A: What about Ponnaruvi, it was made by C V Raman. It was the story of Karna. Karna's wife is pregnant, he is giving her mangoes..

Q: Was this an imaginary story or from Mahabharata?

A: It is said that Mahabharata has a story of this mangoes. She is pleading him for mangoes, a story like that.

Q: Was it Ponnuruvi or Ponnaruvi?

A: Ponnaruvi. That is the name of Karna's wife

Q: A very tamil name, Ponnaruvi. He would have changed it for his convenience

A: Maybe

Q: What role did you play in it?

A: I played Karnan

02:01:38

Q: Who was Ponnaruvi?

A: K T Rukmini

Q: The stunt actress K T Rukmini.

A: Yes

Q: She acted in films like Minnalkodi. Stunt queen she was known as.

A: Yes

Q: Who were the other actors do you remember?

A: T G Venkatesan

Q: The one who sings well

A: Yes. He sings well.. T S Durairaj

Q: I see he was also there. Where was this shot?

A: Here in Shobhanakala

Q: I see. This one too? C V Raman's own directorial

A: Yes.

02:02:15

Q: Who was the music director for it?

A: G Ramanathan

Q: G Ramanathan was an upcoming music director then?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was the cameraman? Not Rahman

A: No not Rahman

Q: They did with some small time cameraman I think

A: Yes his name was Mari. He was a Shobhanachala studio cameraman

Q: I see. He was used like a staff cameraman. How was Ponnaruvi received by audience?

A: It ran average. Most of them didn't even know such a film released.

Q: Which year did this release, this Ponnaruvi?

A: I think 44 or 45.

Q: I see quite before Mahatma Udhagar.

A: Yes. Because after Mahatma Udhagar I was not in the picture

02:03:03

Q: I see that was the last film of yours

A: Yes. My last film.

Q: You said you had sung in Avvaiyar. But it was later right?

A: Yes. I sang 2 songs in it. Q: But they didn't picturise it?

A: No they weren't songs to be picturised

Q: I see, songs that are played off screen.

A: Yes.

Q: Which songs were these?

A: Those were the sung by Kuravan to Kurathi.

Q: Was there any Kuravan Kurathi dance in it?

A: Yes. He is the husband of two wives. A kurathi by name Vanji comes in it. She is a fortune teller. So there was a song 'Vanji Vanthanale'. (sings the first line but can't carry on). I forgot the song.

Q: Did they picturize this on somebody? As Kuravan Kurathi?

A: A girl danced as the Kurathi Vanji in it.

Q: But you don't remember who it was

A: No. Dandapani Pillai composed for it. He had composed it in a rhythmic style.

Q: Did you go for the shooting of this song?

A: Yes

Q: Was this recorded at Gemini?

A: Yes.

Q: Who composed this song?

A: It was an original Kuravanji song.

Q: This was the Vanji Vanthanale. What was the other song?

A: He is a man with two wives. A song for that situation. It was a comic song. Velayudhan had acted in it

Q: I see the one who was in Gemini.

A: Yes. It was written by Kothamangalam Subbu. (sings) It was a situation where both the wives are fighting with each other.

02:05:18

Q: That you had sung. Also you mentioned that you sang a playback for a Kannada film. Which film was it?

A: It was a film called Krishnaleela. In Kannada. For Editor, director. C V Raju. He brought me into it for the Narada song. They dubbed the film to Tamil.

Q: I see that film was dubbed to Tamil from Kannada.

A: Yes. For the dubbed portion, they gave me the Narada portion. They asked me to sing those songs.

Q: Where was the dubbing?

A: It was in Mysore studio.

Q: In Mysore Navajothi studios or Premiere studio?

A: In Navajothi.

Q: When it comes to dubbing, did you also speak for the dialogue portions as well?

A: No for dialogues they had another person. I sang the songs.

Q: Do you remember the music director in that when you went?

A: The song that I recorded was done by Nagarajan, a flutist. He was part of the G Ramanathan's team. He was from Kerala, a nice person.

Q: I see he had composed it. But you would have had original tracks right.

A: Yes. The song was composed by Dandapani. The tune was composed by Nagarajan.

Q: There must have been an original tune.

A: There was one but we didn't use it.

Q: Then how did they dub it?

A: They cut out that song and replaced it.

Q: I see they had picturised it. Do you remember which artists played that part?

A: No

Q: In Kannada, who played Narada..

A: I don't know. in fact we didn't see the picture. We recorded the song and came back.

02:07:15

||ntai||

Q: After 1947, after you did Mahatma Udhangar, you didn't act in any picture?

A: No I didn't.

Q: Was there any reason for it?

A: Reason..there was a new trend of social based subjects that was coming up. And my period of luck was over by then I think. I tried for a couple of years to see if anyone is interested to cast me. I asked around to Producers and I felt they were not interested. Their respect towards me was also not as before. I decided I don't want it. I voluntarily retired from it.

Q: How many films have you acted in your career?

A: If I remember well, may be 19 or 20 films.

02:08:13

Q: From 1934-47. Among them all what was your most successful film?

A: If you compare with collection, it must be Kacha Devayani.

Q: Yes it is even remembered today. K Subramanyam's film. Is there any other film that you remember? Dasi Aparanji..

A: Yes Dasi Aparanji also ran quite well.

Q: Gemini productions.

A: Yes

Q: It wasn't very successful said A K Shekhar, I told you earlier too.

A: The film ran well, it collected money, what else do you need to call it success. Maybe he felt it that way.

02:09:07

Q: You said you knew Kothamangalam Subbu from Kothamangalam days. Can you tell something about him?

A: He didn't finish even 1st form. But he had a great, prosperous life. He could charm anyone with his speech. Very intelligent too. He is very smart and achieves what he wants to achieve. I don't know how he got the talent to write the stories. We used to hang around together everywhere. We were like brothers. He doesn't know English. Would buy the Harijan paper and read it. I tell him you don't know English why are you buying the Harijan paper

Q: Edited by Mahatma Gandhi

A: Yes. He said if I keep reading it, one day I will get it.

Q: I've known him only in his last days. In those days, he would speak in English

A: That's what I told you he is a very intelligent person. He is very good in writing stories. He would pick up stories from the common people in Kothamangalam village. As he is good in mingling with people, he would pick stories and songs from their life and use them.

Q: He started learning direction after coming to Gemini

A: About direction, he used to assist K Subramanyam. Even when we were doing Shantha Sakkubai, he wrote dialogues in that film.

Q: Sundar Rao Nandkarni direction

A: Yes he had written in that. He had a sharp mind and he got the confidence that he could do it. So everything happened.

Q: He had that talent

A: Even when we were working in Chettiyar's house, he used to write stories and songs. He would pretend that he is writing accounts but he would write stories.

He wrote a story called Chandramohana Samoohathodu and a film was made out of it.

Q: M K Radha acted in it

A: Yes. Even S V Venkataraman and he himself acted in it. Kothamangalam Subbu. T N Meenakshi was the heroine

Q: Who was that?

A: Some girl. I don't know much

02:12:16

Q: I've done a programme with M K Radha before he passed away. He had told me about this film. How was your relation with Sundar Rao Nandkarni while doing Shantha Sakkubai?

A: He was a very good man.

Q: When I was an apprentice at P C Gopalrao's office, he used to come frequently. He had a brother in law, Radhakrishna. He was a production executive later at Vahini.

A: But if you ask why Sundar Rao Nandkarni came to Madras, he had come to repair the Debie camera.

Q: R M Krishnaswamy told me so. It was correct?

A: He had come to Newtowne studio to repair the Debie camera. He was a smart person. He eventually became Shantha Sakkubai's director.

Q: Who made him become that?

A: When he was talking to Royal Talkies people...

Q: Like Babu Iyer

A: Yes. Babu Iyer and Narasimha Iyer. He said I'll direct this film. Before that Y V Rao was supposed to direct the film. They shot and wasted it.

Q: I see they shot it with Y V Rao?

A: Yes.

Q: You were there in that film?

A: Not in the Y V Rao's version. I was part of the second production. That was when they contacted me and Subbu.

02:13:40

Q: Aswathamma was there in it from the beginning?

A: Yes. She was there.

Q: Sarangapani also was there?

A: Yes. Other artists were all there. Only we were the new additions.

Q: So they scrapped the version Y V Rao shot and reshot it with Sundar Rao Nandkarni

A: Yes. They reshot it completely.

Q: Not many know of this fact. Was that shot in Calcutta or here?

A: No everything was in Newtowne Studio

Q: Newtowne had come up well at that time.

A: Yes

02:14:08

Q: You were a singing hero. Among the song you had sung, which was the most popular among public? If you say Thyagaraja Bhagavathar it is 'Manmada Leelai'..if it is M S Subbulakshmi it would be 'Engum nirai nadabrahmam,

Anandam en solven', or song from Meera - bhajan songs and 'Katrinile varum geetham'

A: Yes. Like I told you earlier, it is not easy to sing my songs. But some songs like the one in Dasi Aparanji, that one was popular. People remember that song upon seeing me. There were only a few songs like that

Q: You said you had done Narada role, right?

A: Yes in Tulasi Jalandaran

Q: Were there any popular ones in them? Naradan means there would be many songs

A: Yes it had many songs. Songs were all popular. Film also ran well. 'Nadukkam unakku' is difficult to sing. (sings a little) So my songs were not that popular as it was difficult to sing.

Q: One must be a vidwan to sing like this

A: Of course.

Q: The common man cannot even imagine singing this.

A: Of course. Almost all the songs picturised on me were classical. Even in a film like Krishna Pidaran, a flop film, the songs were gold. I have it in a cassette here. My son has it. I can play it to you if he returns today. He is busy in the office.

Q: Which song was that?

A: In Ceylon radio, early morning, they play these songs and they play a lot of my songs. While in Thiruvarur, the reception used to be good and my son had recorded and kept them.

02:17:11

ntai



Q: Do you remember any of the Krishna Pidan songs?

A: Yes one in Karagarapriya ragam. 'yaaradithal deva..' (sings) I forgot some of it

Q: Who composed music for it, for Krishna Pidan?

A: G Ramanathan. That was his first picture as music director.

Q: He also sings well? G Ramanathan?

A: Yes very well

Q: I'll tell you an interesting incident when I met him. I was a law apprentice at V C Gopaldaswamy's office. A song was very popular at that time. 'eru pootti povaaye'. That was part of a film by Lena Chettiyar. Sarathy Films made a Telugu film with a communist theme. Waheeda Rahman was a small time actress. She was doing South Indian languages then. That song was said to be a copy of a Telugu song. they had sent a notice to Lena Chettiyar. Gopaldaswamy was Lena Chettiyar's advocate. He had come with that notice. He had brought G Ramanathan with him. The advocate has a great knowledge in music and has worked as the advocate for so many film personalities. He was sitting and I was seated next to him. That was the first time I saw Ramanathan. He asked Ramanathan which song was this. Then later he said "it is a folk song and doesn't come under copyright, let us give a reply to this". That is when I met G Ramanathan. Only then I knew he sings. Now there is K V Mahadevan...

A: He sings, writes well too.

Q: I see. Where is he from?

A: I think Krishnapally. His father was in Andhra working in a government job. They all came to Madurai to do their studies. He and his brother Sundara bagavathar.

Q: And G Ramanathan?

A: He was a small boy then. When I knew him, he was 5 years old. His brother Sundara Bhagavathar..I told you right, we did a theatre play on Gnana Soundari. Sundara Bhagavathar was the main man in it. He was Lenal, I was Gnana Soundari.

02:20:12

Q: I see you played Gnana Soundari in it?

A: Yes.

Q: Who played the villain?

A: A man called Krishna Singh, very handsome.

Q: He was a renowned actor?

A: No an amateur actor. Not even amateur. He acted on our request. And an actor called Kuppuswamy for the father role. He was a photographer. He sings very well. He did the character role.

02:20:47

Q: The Gnana Soundari was made twice in the 40s once by Gemini, once by Citadel. The Citadel's version ran very well but this didn't. S V Venkataraman was the music composer. For Citadel. The songs were very popular. They were written for the film or the play had those songs?

A: No they didn't. they were all made for the film. Not any of them were from the plays. Each version had its own uniqueness. The Sankaradas Swamigal version had its own thing. Lenal is teasing the girl, Gnana Soundari. The raja isn't in the place and this man disturbs her. A song was there for that 'kootadi nee' (sings). In the drama. Sankaradasa Swamigal had his own version for it. With Sundara vathiyar with us, 'sakkalathi makkalukku' (sings). This was Sundara vathiyar's version.

Q: He had used English words like soap, scent in it?

A: Yes. He used words like coffee, cake..

Q: No one objected it?

A: They all loved it in fact. Cinema wasn't the only thing then. Theatre plays were a big thing. I am talking about the time when I was 13 years old. Now I am 78. Cinema wasn't the thing then. The English silent films would be shown.

02:23:20

Q: Were any of our silent films shown? Have you seen them?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember any of them?

A: The ones that were produced in Bombay would be brought and screened here. I've seen them. People walk so fast in it.

Q: Yes they were 16 frames per second.

A: Yes. It would look funny.

Q: Do you remember any of the silent films from here? Like R Padmanabhan's?

A: No I don't

02:23:51

Q: Do you remember how many studios were there in Madras when you had come to act?

A: Karthikeya studio I remember,

Q: Ramnath's..it was in Adyar I think

A: Yes in Adyar. There was one Sundaram Sound studios. Where the Sathya studio is located. Newtown had begun by then. In 37.

Q: Do you remember National Movietone Studios? Chidambaram Chettiyar's

A: Yes I remember on the Poonamalle high road.

Q: Before that there was a Mahalakshmi Studios

A: Yes I've heard of it. I don't know much about it

Q: At that time, there were no studios in Kodambakkam

A: No there weren't

Q: Kodambakkam became the cinema hub much later

A: Yes.

Q: Studios were in Mylapore...

A: Poonamalle high road etc. Sound city

Q: I see, the one opposite to Nehru park

A: Yes. A Narayanan's Srinivasa Cinetone.

02:25:11

Q: I know about it. R M Krishnaswamy once told me. You said you've worked there on films like Mirabai

A: Yes yes I have. A very noble person he is.

Q: I've heard he has a son. Was working somewhere and retired

A: Yes he has one son.

Q: He passed away I think. Even his wife Meenakshi is not alive I think

A: No they passed away

02:25:33

Q: Is R Prakash a good friend?

A: Yes

Q: Do you remember him?

A: Yes I remember him very well.

Q: How was he as a director?

A: He was short tempered.

Q: We were talking about R Prakash, who was trained in Hollywood. Raghupathi Venkaiyya's son.

A: Yes very talented guy. I was very new to the field. I wasn't that close with them to know about their personal sides.

Q: You didn't get a chance to be close to them

A: Yes. I was very close to A Narayanan.

Q: You knew him from before?

A: No only through cinema but he was very fond of me. Calls me 'Kothamangalam, Kothamangalam'. Not Seenu. He addresses Subbu as the big Kothamangalam and me as small Kothamangalam. A very friendly guy. We were good together. He takes my suggestions, I take his... We were like a family.

Q: Was R Padmanabhan a good friend?

A: Yes. I've acted in his films. Good to work with.

Q: Is he alive?

A: I think so. He has a habit of thinking about himself in high esteem. He thinks he is the only intelligent guy and no one else. That's a bad character he has.

Q: His son Balu, Balasubramaniam was an advocate. He was my good friend but he passed away a couple of years back. Another son Rangaswamy worked in Calcutta and retired. I think Padmanabhan is still alive above 90 years.

A: I remember he talking only about himself and not others.

02:27:42

Q: Was Raja Sando your friend?

A: I've not worked with him in films but I am a good friend.

Q: How come?

A: So the films like Anadai Penn, Minor Rajamani where Subbu is playing a role, I used to go with him. Even if I am not doing anything, I'll hang around.

Q: What were you doing otherwise then?

A: I was acting in other films. I wasn't sitting idle.

Q: The Anadai Penn talkie version, by Jupiter starring M K Radha

A: Yes the same.

Q: Do you remember which studio they shot Anadai Penn? Was it Mahalakshmi studios?

A: I think so. The one in Poonamallee high road. I don't remember so well. Three of them S K Moideen, Somasundaram, a Chettiyar all of them together did the film. I remember a song 'kadavule kadavule' song in it.

Q: Which film was this Minor Rajamani starring Raja Sando?

A: Some Brahminical story

02:29:22

Q: Have you seen Raja Sando as a director?

A: I've seen him work. A very skillful person. He talks well with everyone. But he used to talk very authoritatively with women, elder or younger. Not that he is disrespectful, it is his friendly nature I was mentioning.

Q: People say about him being a terror on set

A: Not at all. He is like a child.

Q: Then why people say things like that?

A: Maybe the way he talks..he once shouted at Thyagaraja Bhagavathar. There was a crying scene and Thyagaraja Bhagavathar was not being able to do it. He shouted at him saying 'you know how to take 25000 as remuneration. You can't even emote in a scene, who named you Bhagavathar'.

Q: He said so?

A: Yes. But it is fair. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar is a Bhagavathar but on set he is also an artiste like others. Those times, there was more respect. He would say constructive criticism and Bhagavathar also wouldn't mind. That time was different. Nobody would take it to heart. Everyone behaved like it was a family. Nobody would gossip about each other.

Q: Why I asked this question about his temper is because once M K Radha...he is a good friend. I've done a programme with him too. He said Raja Sando would go 'aa teri saala' in between shoots, a habit of being in North India. He would talk without filter with anyone. Like how you said in Anadai Penn the way they acted in suits became a fashion. If one has to wear suit, it must be like M K Radha. I've seen those pictures. that's why I asked is he a rough personality.

A: That's how he behaves but doesn't keep anything in mind.

02:32:05

Q: How is Raja Chandrasekhar as a director?

A: He was also a good director.

Q: Raghunath's brother

A: Yes

Q: Was Raghunath with him from the beginning?

A: Yes. He edits his films

Q: I see he was his editor

A: Yes. He was also good in arranging shots..

Q: Who?

A: Raja Chandrashekhar. He was a kind man. Speaks well with everyone. I like that quality in him. But he was a clumsy guy. Would dress shabbily and doesn't have the look of a director. He just wears a shirt even if it is torn and would do his job.

Q: A modest man you mean

A: Yes

Q: He is from Trichy I think

A: Yes

Q: Tamizhariyum Perumal, a film had come in Raghunath's direction

A: Yes

Q: Did you act in it?

A: No I didn't

Q: But I somehow have a memory of you mentioning about that film

A: That must be...I used to go to meet Raghu sometimes. When I was in Coimbatore doing Krishna Pidan.

Q: Where did they shoot this Tamizharyum Perumal.

A: In Madras Newtown studios.

Q: It was made like a story of Kalidas. T S Dorairaj once told me. He was the hero in it I think

A: Yes. The Nakkeeran in it was Chellappa. The Tamizharyum Perumal was a girl

Q: Who played that role?

A: M R Santhanalakshmi. It was a good film. Though it didn't run well, it had great songs

Q: In that film? Good songs is it?

A: Yes written by Udumalai Narayana Kavi.

02:34:07

Q: You said Udumalai Narayana Kavi was close to you. Famous lyrics writer. He wrote a lot for N S Krishnan and Jupiter. Can you tell us something about him? Cinema lyricist he was very popular at one point. He wrote for Thookku Thookki.

A: There was this song, "Kurangil irundu pirandavan manidhan".

Q: Yes, it was a famous song. He only wrote that?

A: Yes. He was quick to write songs. He won't do any fuss that I need to sit in isolation in a hotel room to think and write or wait for inspiration. He would then and there write songs.

Q: Very fast

A: Yes. I gave him a very tough tune and asked him to write lyrics. For a drama, Parijata Pushpahanam. Myself, K S Ananthanarayana Iyer, S D Subbiah Bhagavathar, T P Rajalakshmi we all got together and played it here in Kothavada theatre. I was studying then. So Ananthanarayanan wanted to do this play.

Q: He was a famous dramatist wasn't he?

A: Yes very accomplished man, very talented. He is a great actor. Does female roles. Though he has a chubby body, if he does Shakuntala, we can keep looking at him the whole day. We will only imagine Shakuntala when we see him. No one can beat him in playing both male and female roles.

02:35:58

Q: You were good friends with T P Rajalakshmi? You said you acted in plays together..

A: I've acted in a lot of dramas with her. Like Valli Thirumanam..

Q: With which troupe?

A: Not with any troupe. It is something called special drama where a contract for a drama would be taken by a person. First he would book me as the lead. Then would book T P Rajalakshmi as the pair. Then a hall would be booked for the play. A harmonist would be booked who can take care of the music part. Then he would pay everyone their advance amount and he would go around doing publicity. On the specified date, we would reach the place and perform the play.

Q: That is called special drama?

A: Yes.

Q: You didn't act with T P Rajalakshmi in any film?

A: No I didn't. In Suguna Sarasa there is a scene related to Krishna. In that she had acted as Yashoda. I wasn't around when they had shot it. I had packed up my portions.

Q: You saw the film. She was there in it?

A: Yes I saw the film. She was there

Q: I've heard she writes, directs, produces...

A: Everything. She does everything.

Q: She is a good artiste?

A: Yes. She is a good artiste

Q: She sings well I think

A: Average. That is enough for dramas.

Recording interrupted

02:37:33

Q: You said you would say something about Udumalai Narayana Kavi

A: I had given him a tune to write a song for. He was writing songs for HMV then. A song was needed for the Bama Vijayam play. I wanted the song to talk about the Parijatham flower. He asked me for a tune.

Q: Which film was this?

A: For Sarangadhara. The original Sarangadhara that I acted in. For that film, a harmonist Govindachami played this tune on harmonium.

Q: There was no words for it

A: No there was only the tune.

Q: You gave him that tune

A: Yes. As soon as I gave, he asked me “tell me what you want. Okay, we need to tell about the Parijatham flower, who gave it, when and where these are the things. Okay give me ten minutes he said.” It is unbelievable how he came up with the song ‘Surar Ulagil’ in ten minutes. (sings) He used to pun on words.

Q: He knew Tamil language at back of his hand

A: Yes. Great people they were. I know him and his family also very well. I’ve also been to his native place in Udumalaipet. There is no one to beat him in writing lyrics. A person called Suradha who was himself a lyricist was there who wrote an article where he mentions there is no one in cinema who could excel in lyric writing more than Udumalai Narayana kavi. He said you can’t compare anyone with Udumalai. And one more thing, you can’t ask him to change a word in what he has written. He will get angry if you say so. Something like that happened in Murugan talkies.

02:41:54

Q: Which film?

A: Ashokakumar film with Thyagaraja Bhagavathar. I’ll tell you about the incident. They called Narayana Kavi and asked him to compose one song in the end. For Thyagaraja Bhagavathar to sing. He said “he won’t sing my songs. He likes Papanasam Sivan’s songs only. But if I write for him, you must make sure that he will definitely sing it. Only if you agree to it, I’ll write.” They agreed and asked him to write. He asked what is the song about. They told him it is for the situation where he is left in the forest blinded. He heard the tune and the situation and wrote the lyrics. ‘Inba thunba...’ (sings) that was his version. It worked very well conceptually and philosophically. But the Producer said there shouldn’t be any word in it that means suffering.

Q: I see the sentiment. Many cinema people have that.

A: He said so. Narayana Kavi defended the point why he wrote the word as suffering is part of life and one should acknowledge it. He argued but they didn't agree. He tore the paper and walked out saying he would never write for them. Papanasam Sivan came in his place and wrote the actual version 'Satvaguna Bodhan'. He was that type of a person

02:43:51

Q: A very strict person

A: Yes. There was a song about Murugan and his wives. You must listen to it. 'Vadivelare Manalare' (sings). A face-off song between Valli and Devayanai. Genius. If I have to tell about him, I can keep talking for the whole day. I am a crazy fan of his.

Q: Anything else you want to share?

A: What else to share. That's it. I am getting old. This is what I have to tell.

02:44:49

Q: That was the interview with Mr. Kothamangalam Seenu. One of the senior most Tamil artistes and singing heroes of yesteryears. Mr Seenu who is now 78, leads a happy, contented, retired life in his own house in Madras. With his children comfortably settled, he has no problems or burdens and he takes life easy as it comes. Even though he is past 75, he is still interested in acting. If any good role comes along, especially in the new exciting medium of television. I thank him and I thank his patience and his readiness to have responded to our request. And I thank you sir on behalf of not only myself but also Mr. P K Nair, the director of the National Film Archives of India and also on behalf of NFAI.

You accepted and agreed to our requests. We are happy and grateful to you for all this. Only if personalities like you cooperate we can do this project of oral film history well. For that you agreed readily and took time out for these two days to sit and talk to me. I am very happy for that. I thank you very much and I wish you the very best of luck and very happy retired, contended life. Thank you sir

Thank you so much.



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