



National Film Archive of India

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Government of India

Interview of Director, Producer, Editor and Writer S. Ramanathan of Indian Cinema by Randor Guy

00:00:00-00:01:50

This is Randor Guy interviewing Mr. S. Ramanathan, film director, scriptwriter and one of the senior technicians of Tamil Cinema. Mr. Ramanathan has been a very active Assistant Director before he started making films on his own and he has worked in Tamil production not only in Madras, but also in Coimbatore, Salem and outside India in Malaya in the 1950s. He has had the privilege and pleasure of working with eminent Tamil filmmakers like Mr. K Ramnath, R. S Mani and many others. He made films for very famous Shaw Brothers of Malaya in Singapore in the local Malay language and he has to his credit quite a few successful films in that language outside India and also in India. This interview, the first one with Mr. Ramanathan takes place in the afternoon of July 20th 1988 Wednesday at his flat in the seaside neighbourhood of Besant Nagar, Madras. Mr. Ramanathan speaks in English as well as in Tamil.

00:01:51-00:09:58

Randor Guy : Good afternoon Mr. Ramanathan. It is indeed very nice of you to have agreed to my request to do this program for the Aural Film History Project of the National Film Archive of India. I explained to you the purpose and scope of this project where we go to the original sources of film history still available to us- senior technicians like you, actors, actresses, directors, the entire gamut of the film technique or film craft, and now I think it has come to your turn to help us by recalling and reminiscing your memories your recollections. Over the

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past so many years you've been in this film industry and now thank you, I'm very grateful to you and I extend my thanks to you; not only on my behalf but also on the behalf of the National Film Archive of India, Pune, particularly its director Mr. P.K Nair who has been a kind of a guiding force, he and his project. Thank you very much for agreeing to this and if you are ready, we can start off.

Ramanathan : Thank you Randor. It is a pleasure for me too to do this interview with you.

Randor Guy : Can you tell us something about your early childhood? Where you were born and your educational background and things like that? Briefly.

Ramanathan : Yes, I was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and I had my education there. Right up to Senior Cambridge and then I went over to Sri Lanka where my father had settled down after he had retired.

Randor Guy : What was your father?

Ramanathan : My father was an accountant in the Malayan Railways in those days. He retired and went to Sri Lanka and did some agricultural production.

Randor Guy : He was a native of India originally?

Ramanathan : Originally, yes.

Randor Guy : Which part of India?

Ramanathan : Kumbakonam in Tanjore district.

Randor Guy : I see...

Ramanathan : Yes. And my mother is from Chidambaram. And then he settled down there and he did some business also.

Randor Guy : In Sri Lanka?

Ramanathan : In Sri Lanka.

Randor Guy : In Colombo?

Ramanathan : No in Jaffna. Then I had to continue with my college education at St Joseph's college in Maradana in Colombo.

Randor Guy : In Colombo? I see...

Ramanathan : Yes. Having done that, I was all the time very much interested in films. I was seeing films during my school days.

Randor Guy : You were a very avid movie goer..

Ramanathan : Yes, really very avid.

Randor Guy : What kind of films were you watching?

Ramanathan : Well, I was seeing all kinds of films, any film that came in Malaysia, of course in Malaya actually in those days... there were a number of theatres in Kuala Lumpur. And although a very bright student in school, I spent more time seeing films.

Randor Guy : Cut class and see films?

Ramanathan : Cut class and see films? Oh, not cut class. I couldn't cut class those days there, because under the British headmaster the punishment was very severe.

Randor Guy : What language films were you seeing in Malay?

Ramanathan : I was seeing only English films.

Randor Guy : Was there Malayan language films made?

Ramanathan : Not in those days.

Randor Guy : When was this period? Post 1930s?

Ramanathan : Yes, I was there up to 1935 in Malaya in Kuala Lumpur.

Randor Guy : In Kuala Lumpur.. I see.

Ramanathan : Yes. I used to see films right from 1925 onwards.

Randor Guy : That is silent films?

Ramanathan : Silent films. They used to project films even in our school you know. Cowboy films, Wood Gibson., (inaudible) all those films...

Randor Guy : Old heroes.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And you've seen them all on screen?

Ramanathan : On screen. In our school days, yes. 16mm. Then of course I promoted myself to seeing films in the theatre and I used to go on the sly and see.

Randor Guy : Without the knowledge of your parents?

Ramanathan : Yes, without the knowledge of my parents.

Randor Guy : And your father was opposed to this?

Ramanathan : Oh, he was dead against it. Even for seeing films.

Randor Guy : Yet you landed in films... The irony! Then what happened?

Ramanathan : Then of course having seen *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*- Gary Cooper's...

Randor Guy : 1939. Frank Capra's famous film.

Ramanathan : Yes, having seen that, it got stuck in my mind that I'm very much interested in films...acting.

Randor Guy : As a career? You wanted to be an actor!

Ramanathan : I was thinking...I'm not as tall as Gary Cooper, my complexion is medium. I forgot all that. Of course, I tried the American accent and British accent and so on, I didn't do very well in that but I was imagining that I could be Gary Cooper. Yes, and forgetting everything else. And so that started working in my mind. Then of course I tried seeing films and when I came to Sri Lanka also, even while at college I used to see films and now I used to see even Tamil films in Sri Lanka.

Randor Guy : In Malaysia, Malaya as it was called- were there Tamil films that were projected or screened at the time?

Ramanathan : Yes, there used to be some films...

Randor Guy : Do you recall seeing any?

Ramanathan : Yes, I remember having seen one- *Kovalan*.

Randor Guy : Was it a silent version or sound?

Ramanathan : I think it was the silent version of *Kovalan*.

Randor Guy : Silent version of *Kovalan*?

Ramanathan : Yes, I think I was at school.

Randor Guy : Do you remember anything more about this film *Kovalan*? The silent version?

Ramanathan : Except, I could remember that *Kovalan* and...

Randor Guy : You remember who played *Kovalan*?

Ramanathan : No, I was not interested. Not at all interested.

Randor Guy : Just tried it as a matter of entertainment...

Ramanathan : In fact, my father was very particular about my studying Tamil. He used to ask me to study highly classical Tamil. I was dead against it. I used to speak only in English. Mostly at home I used to speak in Tamil with my mother and my father. But I never used to like Tamil. The British influence was probably there on me. Then of course after coming to Sri Lanka I began to see Tamil films.

Randor Guy : You remember any of the films you saw in the Sri Lankan period of your life? Tamil films I mean.

Ramanathan : Yes, I used to see some pictures like you know in those days... M K Thyagaraja Bhagavatar's *Sathyaseelan*.

Randor Guy : Do you remember anything about *Sathyaseelan*?

Ramanathan : I only remember Thyagaraja Bhagavatar was the guy. Don't even remember who the heroine was...

Randor Guy : Devasena. M.S. Devasena.

Ramanathan : M.S Devasena, yes.

Randor Guy : She subsequently married Dhandapani Desikar.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And who directed *Sathyaseelan*, do you remember?

Ramanathan : That was one Mr. Sampath Kumar, whom I later...

Randor Guy : He later came.. Do you remember anything about Sampath Kumar? Because I see his name in some old film books, magazines, songbooks and things like that. But nobody seems to know much about this Sampath Kumar. Can you tell something about this Sampath Kumar? Who was he? What was he?

Ramanathan : Well, I didn't know that he directed *Sathyaseelan* until I met him through a friend of mine, one Mr. K R Venugopal Sharma who has done the Thiruvalluvar painting, singer, actor, comedian and...

Randor Guy : *Vikatakavi*, Mr. K R V Sharma?

Ramanathan : Yes. He was very good at mimicry and all that. He introduced me to Sampath Kumar when I was in Coimbatore.

Randor Guy : Was he from Madras? This Sampath Kumar?

Ramanathan : Well, his background is very vague. He used to say that he was a Tamilian but some others used to tell me that he came from Karnataka. But he used to speak only in Tamil and he was staying all alone.

Randor Guy : He was in Coimbatore only?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Where was *Sathyaseelan* made in Coimbatore?

Ramanathan : I don't know where it was made. I only saw that film.

Randor Guy : You only saw the film... Was it a very successful film? I was told it was a hit.

Ramanathan : Yes, I think. Yes, it was a hit. I think Mr. Thyagaraja Bhagavatar had a fancy for Mr. Sampath Kumar for having directed that film.

Randor Guy : But he did not direct any other films I think.

Ramanathan : No, he had directed some.

Randor Guy : Not Bhagavatar, After *Sathyaseelan*, he did not direct him.

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : What happened to Sampath Kumar afterwards?

Ramanathan : Well, I heard that he passed away. I don't know when. But he did a few films. The last time I met him was I think somewhere around 1940s.

Randor Guy : After that he faded. He seems to have faded almost from films.

Ramanathan : Yes.

00:09:59-00:14:57

Randor Guy : Now we'll go back to your Sri Lankan life. After your student days at St Joseph's Colombo that you spent in Sri Lanka, In Colombo, what happened?

Ramanathan : Well, you know I saw that film *Chintamani*.

Randor Guy : That is Y.V Rao's *Chintamani*.

Ramanathan : Y.V Rao's *Chintamani*.

Randor Guy : 1937..

Ramanathan : '37.

Randor Guy : Royal Talkies Distributors.

Ramanathan : Yes. It was being shown at New Elphinstone in Colombo.

Randor Guy : Was it a big theatre, famous theatre in Colombo?

Ramanathan : In Colombo it was one of those...

Randor Guy : Posh theatre?

Ramanathan : Not very posh theatre. It was a second-class theatre. And Regal was better and it used to be run by Ceylon Theatres and Mr. Gardiner was managing the Managing Director.

Randor Guy : Chittampalam Gardiner.

Ramanathan : Yes. And Elphinstone Theatre was owned by somebody else.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : And they showed *Chintamani* there. And as I said, I never used to see any Tamil films, until I saw this *Chintamani*. I was very much fascinated. It struck me that there was very good acting by this Y V Rao in that film. Natural acting. For the first time I noticed that all that stage type of acting and eloquence was all gone and here was a very nice and natural performance.

Randor Guy : It was more cinematic.

Ramanathan : Very cinematic.

Randor Guy : Not stagy or dramatic.

Ramanathan : Nothing at all. It was very natural.

Randor Guy : No melodrama.

Ramanathan : Very natural. And the thing was, in that film that *Chintamani*- the whole dialogue was classical Tamil.

Randor Guy : High-flown.

Ramanathan : Yes. Not colloquial. Classical Tamil.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : And it was so naturally expressed by Y V Rao.

Randor Guy : He also directed this film.

Ramanathan : He, he's the director of the film. It was a big hit.

Randor Guy : I know it was a super hit of early cinema...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : I'm told that Royal Talkies Distributors made so much money that they built a theatre out of the profits and called it *Chintamani*.

Ramanathan : Yes. Exactly. In Madurai. Such a big success. And I saw it about 40 to 50 times.

Randor Guy : 40-50 times! Wow. I see.

Ramanathan : Yes. Just for V Y Rao.

Randor Guy : What is it that fascinated you so much about Y V Rao?

Ramanathan : Acting.

Randor Guy : Acting? Not the technical performance?

Ramanathan : Technically I did not know much. I used to see English films or a bit of American films. This film could not come near that. But I forgot all that. The only thing that attracted me was his acting and the songs of course.

Randor Guy : Music of Bhagavatar and K Aswathamma. You remember Aswathamma in *Chintamani*?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : She was very good in *Chintamani*.

Ramanathan : But as an actress I don't think she was as good as a singer...

Randor Guy : She was more a singer than an actress.

Ramanathan : More a singer than an actress. Yes. And she had that Kannada accent all the time. In Tamil, it was very obvious.

Randor Guy : Why I'm asking is, recently we had a film appreciation course in Madras where Mr. P.K Nair, the Director of NFAI delivered a lecture on History of Indian Cinema.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He brought with him a few reels of *Chintamani*. Incidentally I had not seen *Chintamani* because that time I was probably not born. This was the first time I was seeing *Chintamani* and he projected about 3 or 4 reels and started discussing it. The camera placement, it was quite modern. And what struck me was that the accents of even Y. V Rao showed very clearly that he was a Telugu man.

Ramanathan : (laughs) Yes.

Randor Guy : Because he comes from my place Nellore, we both come from the same place. He was a very good friend of my father.

Ramanathan : I see.

Randor Guy : And later when I entered films I met him at the time he was almost dying. So even for the dialogues, for instance, you talked about the Kannada accent of Aswathamma; I supposed in those days they did not bother much about this accent.

Ramanathan : You see they gave preference to the singing talent. She was such a good singer; she had such a good voice. But compared to when she sang that “Krishna Krishna” in that film, it is an adaptation of Shanta Apte’s ‘*Suno Suno*’ from *Amarjothi*...

Randor Guy : *Amarjothi*?

Ramanathan : I mean Shanta Apte was definitely far better with her voice than Aswathamma. But for us I think in the south Aswathamma was better.

Randor Guy : So you saw it about 40-50 times. Then what happened?

Ramanathan : Then it struck me that I should do something about it. I should try to become an actor in Tamil Films.

Randor Guy : Like Y V Rao?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He was your idol.

Ramanathan : He was my idol. And I wanted to see him and somehow join Tamil films, for which I had an aversion for at one time, but this changed my whole attitude.

Randor Guy : It was *Chintamani* influenced you to come into cinema. Am I right?

Ramanathan : Yes certainly. Of course, I started thinking of Gary Cooper as an actor, but now I thought Tamil films are nearby, why don’t I start here in Tamil films and then probably go on to become Gary Cooper? (laughs)

00:14:59-00:18:03

Randor Guy : (laughs) Then?

Ramanathan : Then in 1939 that I came over to Madurai.

Randor Guy : Madurai?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : What got you to Madurai.

Ramanathan : You see I was quite raw in this you know. I didn't know the actual locations and all that. I didn't make any enquiry, except for the fact that I knew that Royal Talkies Distributors...

Randor Guy : They had their office there. They were from Madurai...

Ramanathan : They were from Madurai so I thought...

Randor Guy : Yarn merchants from Madurai.

Ramanathan : So, I thought...

Randor Guy : Everybody in films...

Ramanathan : Should be from Madurai...

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : Then I got into a train and came down from Sri Lanka to Madurai with a letter of introduction to a friend of my friend and went and saw him. I said, 'I want to see Y V Rao. I heard he was here in Madurai'. 'Oh, he is not here in Madurai. They make films in Madras not in Madurai'

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : So, I said, 'Oh I see. I want to see him that's why I came'. 'No', he said 'I don't know Y.V Rao personally, but I know Mr. A A Somayajulu'.

Randor Guy : He was the dialogue writer, A A Somayajulu...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Can you tell us something about this Mr. Somayajulu?

Ramanathan : Well, he wrote the dialogues for *Chintamani*.

Randor Guy : He was the dialogue writer for *Chintamani*?

Ramanathan : Yes, he was the dialogue writer.

Randor Guy : His name sounds like an Andhraite, 'Somayajulu'.

Ramanathan : Yes, he was an Andhra man.

Randor Guy : Then how come he did dialogues for a Tamil film?

Ramanathan : Why, don't you too? You are a...

Randor Guy : I've been here for so many years, I've learnt the language.

Ramanathan : No, it's not that...

Randor Guy : He was talented..

Ramanathan : He was talented. There are some people like that...

Randor Guy : He also seems to have directed one or two films.

Ramanathan : Well, I don't know

Randor Guy : Because in some of the press announcement cuttings of which I have in my research album, his name appears. 'A A Somayajulu- direction'.

Ramanathan : I see

Randor Guy : But I'm not sure whether those films saw the light of the day later. But he seems to have been basically a writer.

Ramanathan : Yes. He was a writer. He wrote dialogues for all of Mr. Y.V Rao's films.

Randor Guy : Maybe he was an associate of Y. V Rao.

Ramanathan : Yes, he was all the time with him. Even one of the films called *Swarnalatha*.

Randor Guy : Y.V Rao's *Swarnalatha*.

Ramanathan : Y.V Rao directed, and he acted in it. and Somayajulu wrote the dialogue.

Randor Guy : Have you seen the film *Swarnalatha*?

Ramanathan : Yes, I saw it.

Randor Guy : What kind of film was that?

Ramanathan : It is kind of you know something like "*A Star Is Born*" from Hollywood.

Randor Guy : *A Star Is Born* from Hollywood? Adapted from that?

Ramanathan : Not exactly. You find some traces of that film.

Randor Guy : Do you remember who the other artists were in this film? Apart from Y V Rao?

Ramanathan : The other artists who was popular was Aranganayaki who was the heroine.

Randor Guy : The name figures and disappears again.. Aranganayaki. You remember who she is?

Ramanathan : I don't remember her.

Randor Guy : You remember her now? Her name appears in...

Ramanathan : Oh Aranganayaki! She acted has in even *Chintamani* as Thyagaraja Bhagavatar's wife.

Randor Guy : She was fairly prominent at that time.

Ramanathan : Yes, she was. She must have come from the stage.

Randor Guy : I see. Because her name appears now and then in the course of my research. Aranganayaki.

Ramanathan : Yes. K Aranganayaki.

Randor Guy : Nobody seems to know much about her these days.

Ramanathan : No. She was an old-time actress.

Randor Guy : Was she from the stage?

Ramanathan : She came from the stage.

Randor Guy : I see. *Swarnalatha*... Did you see this film?

Ramanathan : I saw this film.

Randor Guy : By the time did you meet Y V Rao?

Ramanathan : Yes, I saw him in 1939 as I said.

00:18:04-00:22:52

Randor Guy : You came to Madras from Madurai with a letter of introduction to Mr. Somayajulu. Then what happened?

Ramanathan : And I told Mr. Somayajulu, 'I would like to join the films, I want to meet Mr. Y.V Rao'. He said, 'Alright, I'll see that you get an appointment and so on.' And it went on for some time. I couldn't meet him. Then finally one fine day, Mr. Y V Rao himself came to see Mr. Somayajulu.

Randor Guy : Where was Mr. Somayajulu living? Do you recall?

Ramanathan : He was in Royapettah, on Kalingaraya Mudali street...

Randor Guy : Near the present Pilot theatre?

Ramanathan : Yes, just opposite that.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : He was staying there.

Randor Guy : Where was Y V Rao living then?

Ramanathan : He was in that Lloyds Road corner.

Randor Guy : Lloyds corner. Where that lawyer B P Raman lived? The same building?

Ramanathan : Adjacent building, I think.

Randor Guy : Where you have M G Ramachandran's house and all that now.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Somewhere there.

Ramanathan : Now it's all changed.

Randor Guy : I know.

Ramanathan : He also had a company called Chintamani Pictures Pvt. Ltd.

Randor Guy : Who? Y V Rao? Of his own?

Ramanathan : Yes. In Royapettah High Road, along that Pilot Theatre line.

Randor Guy : I see. Chintamani Pictures?

Ramanathan : Yes. After having done that film *Chintamani*, he started a company of his own called Chintamani Pictures Ltd and he directed a film called *Meera*.

Randor Guy : Yes that was the first film made in Newtowne Studio.

Ramanathan : First film in Newtowne Studio.

Randor Guy : Where he played a gimmick with the name of Vasundhara and all that.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Vasundhara was a singer at the time. He was supposed to have booked her and announced it in the Press. But she refused to act saying that she was not interested in films.

Ramanathan : You mean Vasundhara Yadhav or...

Randor Guy : Vasundhara Devi. And he used some other girl who played Meera and he called her Vasundhara. That's why the public...

Ramanathan : (laughs)

Randor Guy : The public refused to be fooled and the picture failed I believe...

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : But that was a first film shot in Newtowne Studio after it was started.

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : That was probably made under this Chintamani Pictures banner.

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : Then what happened? You succeeded in meeting Y. V. Rao?

Ramanathan : Yes, I finally met him. And I told him, 'See I've come here. I want to join the films and I want to specially work with you because I was so fascinated by your acting in *Chintamani* and I hope that you would give me a chance.' He said, "I'm not doing anything at

the moment and I'll try to help you some time." And then I used to visit him very often. I was staying in Hotel Everest at the time.

Randor Guy : In Park Town. On Poonamallee High Road?

Ramanathan : Yes. From there I used to come and see him almost every day or every other day.

Randor Guy : Was he very receptive to you or...?

Ramanathan : He was a very nice man. He used to talk well and converse well and so on. In fact, when I told him that I was fascinated by Fredrik March's performance in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the technique used, he immediately said, "I've used some technique you know in my film *Meera* on those lines... Not *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* but on those lines..." So, he was a very enthusiastic man. And he said, "You see I can't promise you anything now at the moment, you have to wait for some time." So that wait seemed endless.

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : And in the mean while I thought why not go around and see other people. And I went to see Mr. Raja Sandow.

Randor Guy : Raja Sandow the famous writer and director?

Ramanathan : Yes. He had started in Hindi films. He went from Pudukkottai to the north and he was very famous in Hindi and he was a big star in those days.

Randor Guy : Where did you meet Mr. Raja Sandow?

Ramanathan : Well, he was living in Kilpauk in a bungalow which was rented for him by Mr. Thyagaraja Bhagavatar because he was directing...

Randor Guy : *Thiruneelakantar* ..

Ramanathan : *Thiruneelakantar*. He was directing that film. And I went to him. He was very receptive and a very nice man.

Randor Guy : You went and asked for an acting chance?

Ramanathan : Acting... yes.

Randor Guy : In *Thiruneelakantar*?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Was it under production at the time?

Ramanathan : Yes, it was.

Randor Guy : What did Raja Sandow say?

Ramanathan : He said, "You see I'm only a director and I'm only under the employ of Thyagaraja Bhagavatar"

Randor Guy : (laughs) Very modest..

Ramanathan : Yes. He said, "He's the proprietor. He's the boss. Why don't you go and see him? Because I leave all these things to him. But I can choose the actors and so on but he has to give his consent. So why don't you see him first?"

Randor Guy : Did you see Thyagaraja Bhagavatar?

Ramanathan : Well, I went to his place which was also in Kilpauk. And every time I went there, there was someone asking me a hundred odd questions. 'Where are you from, have you

gotten an appointment? You want to see this Bhagavatar? What for do you want to see him?' and so on. So, I said,' No I want to have a talk with him because I want to join the film'. "Oh no you can't see him now, he's too busy, he's very engaged,' This and that... So, it went on for about three or four five days and I got tired and left.

Randor Guy : (laughs)

00:22:53-00:25:04

Ramanathan : And then I went to Mr. Raja Chandrashekhar.

Randor Guy : Raja Chandrashekar another director.

Ramanathan : Yes. He used to direct those B L Kemka films. Kemka was the producer.

Randor Guy : B L Kemka...

Ramanathan : Kemka was the producer of all his *Maya Machindra*, *Dakhshayagnam*, *Jothi Ramayya*. All those films were...

Randor Guy : They were all made in Calcutta.

Ramanathan : Yes, they were all made in Calcutta.

Randor Guy : The producer was Kemka is it?

Ramanathan : Yes, B L Kemka.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : And so, they were staying in a lodge.

Randor Guy : Where was this lodge?

Ramanathan : You know just opposite the present Dasaprakash on Poonamallee High Road in Kilpauk. When you turn to Purasawalkam High Road, just past that you see there was a bungalow. Now it's all changed.

Randor Guy : I know.

Ramanathan : Some other buildings have come up. There I used to visit the place and I used to try to see him and...

Randor Guy : How was the reception there at Raja Chandrashekhar's place?

Ramanathan : Well, when I went there, he was not there. There were other people there seated on the verandah. Various people. One of them was M. G. Ramachandran.

Randor Guy : MGR!

Ramanathan : Yes, later known as MGR.

Randor Guy : What was he doing there?

Ramanathan : He was just an ordinary actor at the time.

Randor Guy : Trying for roles?

Ramanathan : No, he was...

Randor Guy : He was already an actor.

Ramanathan : He acted in all of Raja Chandrashekar's films. He and his brother MG Chakrapani. And he was there. I remember that they had a very great regard for Chandrashekar. Respect for Raja Chandrashekar.

Randor Guy : Who? M G Ramachandran.

Ramanathan : Yes everybody. He was just an actor there. I remember him performing a scene from Ritz Brothers. I forget the title of that film...

Randor Guy : You remember who was performing?

Ramanathan : M G Ramachandran.

Randor Guy : For whose benefit?

Ramanathan : He was entertaining his friends...

Randor Guy : Entertaining his friends in the veranda...

Ramanathan : In the veranda.

Randor Guy : (laughs) I see.

Ramanathan : He saw that film and the scene where one of the Ritz Brothers rides on a horse and when he gets on the horse, just like in Charlie Chaplin's you know, handling the (inaudible) just like that... one of the Ritz Brothers, when he gets on the horse, he can't get his knees (inaudible) so he walked on in that way...

Randor Guy : As if he was on the horse?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : So MGR imitated that?

Ramanathan : He imitated that.

Randor Guy : (laughs) I see.

00:25:05-00:26:43

Ramanathan : That was a nice group. So finally, I happened to meet Mr. Raja Chandrasekar and he said, “What do you want to see me about?” I said, “I want to join the films, I want to be an actor and I would like to act in one of your films.” He asked, “What experience do you have?” I said, “I have acted in school dramas and college dramas”. “Do you know anything about films?” “Well, I’ve seen a lot of films” I said, “hundreds of films, thousands of films probably. Right from my school days I’ve been seeing films after films”. I gave a big list of all the films I’d seen and I said I wanted to be like Gary Cooper and that it was my ambition-forgetting, I couldn’t be by any chance. He told me, “Oh then this is not the place for you, you should have gone to Hollywood!”

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : “You should have gone to Hollywood!”

Randor Guy : Not Kodambakkam!

Ramanathan : No, there was no Kodambakkam then it was Kilpauk then.

Randor Guy : I see. In Newtown Studios.

Ramanathan : So, he said, “You should be in Hollywood”. Then everybody else around there didn’t laugh, they were serious. So, I thought he really meant something. I thought, “Oh I’m an important man I should go to Hollywood”.

Randor Guy : (laughs).

Ramanathan : Then finally when I wanted to leave, he said, “Young man!! Give it a try to go to Hollywood. Don’t waste your time here.”

Randor Guy : Was he being sarcastic?

Ramanathan : I think he was. There was silence. And they must have laughed after I left.

Randor Guy : Then what happened?

Ramanathan : Then I left and felt it was not going to work and decided I’d come back to Sri Lanka and do as my Father said.

00:26:44-00:42:57

Randor Guy : But your father opposed these or did he encourage you or did he just wink?

Ramanathan : No. He was dead against it.

Randor Guy : Dead against you joining films.

Ramanathan : Definitely dead against... He wanted me to study and win the Queen’s scholarship in Kuala Lumpur. You know in those days.

Randor Guy : And go to England.

Ramanathan : To England. In those days the Queen’s scholarship was a very prestigious scholarship award. Every year the brightest student is given an opportunity to go to England to study law or medicine or ...

Randor Guy : In England?

Ramanathan : Yes. That was my father's aim, but my views were different.

Randor Guy : You wanted to be a movie man. Movie actor. Gary Cooper!

Ramanathan : (laughs)

Randor Guy : Then what happened?

Ramanathan : Then I went back and I wanted to be on my own because there was some disagreement with my father and I wanted to be on my own, I joined the British Admiralty.

Randor Guy : In Trincomalee.

Ramanathan : In Trincomalee in Sri Lanka. In Asian Naval Base.

Randor Guy : That time the war had started?

Ramanathan : The war had started. Second World War. The war had started when I was in Madras in 1939.

Randor Guy : Yes.

Ramanathan : When I had gone to see Mr. Y V Rao. I joined the navy, the British Admiralty and got to work there. Then they shifted me to Bombay via Colombo to open an office of the Naval establishment.

Randor Guy : In Bombay?

Ramanathan : In Bombay. Cash department.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : Yes, I was in cash department of the naval establishment.

Randor:Then how did you land in movies? From Navy to movies is quite a jump.

Ramanathan : Yes, that was in the back of my mind; probably after I got employed there, it was...

Randor Guy : Submerged..

Ramanathan : Submerged and finally one day I went to take a photo of mine in Central Camera in Bombay.

Randor Guy : What is this Central Camera in Bombay? Was it a studio?

Ramanathan : It was a very famous studio by one Mr. Ambalal J Patel.

Randor Guy : In Bombay?

Ramanathan : In Bombay. He was the foremost photographer in Bombay.

Randor Guy : Still photographer Ambalal J Patel. And his studio was called Central Camera.

Ramanathan : On D N road.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : I went in to take a photo and after taking the photo I saw Mr. Ellis R. Dungan coming there.

Randor Guy : Oh the famous director!

Ramanathan : Yes. I said, “You’re just the man I wanted to see”

Randor Guy : You knew that was Ellis R. Dungan?

Ramanathan : Yes, I had seen his photos.

Randor Guy : You had seen his photographs?

Ramanathan : And apart from that Mr. Patel told me that it was Ellis R. Dungan.

Randor Guy : Was Ellis R. Dungan already famous at that time?

Ramanathan : Oh yes, he was very famous.

Randor Guy : Already?

Ramanathan : Yes. This was around the war time; I think he had already done...

Randor Guy : *Sathyaseelan?*

Ramanathan : No not *Sathyaseelan*. *Sathi Leelavathi...*

Randor Guy : *Sathi Leelavathi* in 1936. Then he made *Seemanthini Kalyanam* then *Kalamegam*, *Two Brothers* and I think he started *Shakuntalai* at that time.

Ramanathan : Yes, *Shakuntalai* at that time. Around that time, he came there. I met him and I said, “You’re the man I wanted to see.”

Randor Guy : Can you say describe something about Ellis R. Dungan, how he looked and what kind of appearance he had?

Ramanathan : He was very unassuming...

Randor Guy : Was he very young at that time? I'm told he was in his 20s when he came.

Ramanathan : He must have been. When I saw him...

Randor Guy : We were talking about Ellis R Dungan. Can you tell us something about what he looked like? What kind of a person was he when you first met him at the Central Camera Still Studio in Bombay?

Ramanathan : He was a gentleman. I could see.

Randor Guy : He was an American.

Ramanathan : He is an American. He is from Virginia. And, unlike usual Americans that we see, he was sort of you know an Indianized American.

Randor Guy : What exactly do you mean by Indianized American? Can you elaborate on that?

Ramanathan : He seemed very much attached to things Indian.

Randor Guy : He loved India?

Ramanathan : He loved India very much.

Randor Guy : And things Indian.

Ramanathan : And things Indian. And of course, his accent, American way of speaking was there all the time, but not so strong as usual Americans'.

Randor Guy : You could understand his accent?

Ramanathan : Very easily understandable. And he was a very nice man in so many ways. He was very accommodative.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : He received me; he will talk to you...

Randor Guy : No airs?

Ramanathan : No airs at all. He was like a friend. Right from the beginning. Even though I was a stranger and we sat there and Mr. Patel gave some tea for us, we sat and chatted and he said, "You were trying to...". I said, "I want to join the films as an actor and I tried and failed and now I want to act in your films under your direction as an actor." He said, "What are you doing now?" I said, "I'm in the Admiralty."

"How much are you being paid?"

I said, "I'm getting paid four hundred rupees". Those days it was a very big salary.

And he said, "You want to leave that to join Tamil films?" I said, "Yes I've been all the time wanting to join Tamil films."

"Well, you may not get that four hundred rupees straightaway"

I said I didn't mind.

"The way you talk about Hollywood and so on, I know Hollywood. You see if you think Tamil films are Hollywood, you're sadly mistaken."

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : "It's far from Hollywood. Whatever we are doing there is only the best we can do that's all. Hollywood is Hollywood. And Tamil films are Tamil films."

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : I was not at all discouraged. I said I anyhow wanted to join him. He said, "Alright I'll leave you my address and you can write to me and I'll try to..."

Randor Guy : He was so warm and friendly even though you were a stranger to him.

Ramanathan : Yes. Very warm and friendly. Then I thanked him and went back to work, as I was of course working all the time and finally I wrote to him at Spencer's Hotel where he was staying.

Randor Guy : That's where now the Indian Overseas bank ...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : It was that Ambassador hotel.

Ramanathan : Yes exactly. He was staying there.

Randor Guy : At that time he was a bachelor?

Ramanathan : He was a bachelor. He was in his thirties at that time. And then I wrote to him and he said, "If you happen to drop by this way, you can come and see me"

Randor Guy : He wrote to you?

Ramanathan : Yes. Then I took up the idea, took leave and went over there.

Randor Guy : Dropped by! (laughs)

Ramanathan : Dropped by and saw him. And then he gave me letters of introduction to Mr. K. Subramaniam who was then directing films here and Mr. T R Sundaram of Modern Theatres.

Randor Guy : Salem..

Ramanathan : Yes. Then to Mr. Soundararajan of Tamil Nadu Talkies.

Randor Guy : S. Soundararajan.

Ramanathan : S. Soundararajan of Tamil Nadu Talkies. And to Mr. Somasundaram of Jupiter Pictures.

Randor Guy : Coimbatore?

Ramanathan : No, he was in Madras. I took all of these letters and went around and everybody was nice to me.

Randor Guy : Just nice? (laughs)

Ramanathan : Just nice. (laughs). I didn't get any opportunity. Even the response was not so favourable. Everybody tried to give some excuse or other.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : I had to get away and finally I went to Jupiter Pictures where I couldn't meet Mr. Somasundaram but I met his manager and he told me...

Randor Guy : Who was this manager?

Ramanathan : Mr. P K Kaimal.

Randor Guy : Kaimal. A good friend of mine.

Ramanathan : Yes, a very good man.

Randor Guy : He is leading Malayalam Producer, Distributor, Theatre owner.

Ramanathan : Yes exactly. Very nice man.

Randor Guy : I know him very well.

Ramanathan : And he said, “Yeah you’re very enthusiastic, it’s good you have come at the right time but I don’t know, the proprietor is not here but we are taking on lease the Central Studios in Coimbatore.”

Randor Guy : They took the studio on lease?

Ramanathan : On lease.

Randor Guy : And you met Kaimal in Madras?

Ramanathan : In Madras.

Randor Guy : You remember where this Jupiter office was?

Ramanathan : It was in Purasawalkam High Road.

Randor Guy : Where that Kumudum office is? Same building?

Ramanathan : Yes. I met him there at the office and he said I could come again. So later I met Mr. Somasundaram and his partner S. K. Mohideen.

Randor Guy : In Madras?

Ramanathan : Yes. It was a Hindu-Muslim team.

Randor Guy : I know.

Ramanathan : They were quite impressed and they said, “Alright you can go back to Bombay and we’ll let you know”. So I came back to Bombay. I was on leave. After some time, I received

a letter from Jupiter Pictures asking me to come to Madras from where I could go to Coimbatore to the Central Studios for a makeup test.

Randor Guy : Makeup?

Ramanathan : For the role of a hero!

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : In the film *My Son*.

Randor Guy : *En Magan -My Son?*

Ramanathan : Yes. *En Magan*. So, I was highly elated and thought I had already won the film world and started building castles in the air. Finally, I decided to leave the job.

Randor Guy : You resigned that job!

Ramanathan : I resigned the job.

Randor Guy : (inaudible) to Madras?

Ramanathan : I gave my resignation and the authorities were reluctant to part with me but I said, “No films come first” They said, ‘even in England we don’t regard films as so important as you think’.

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : They tried to discourage me but I somehow came. I left and came over to Madras, from where Mr. Kaimal put me on a train to Coimbatore for my makeup test.

Randor Guy : What happened on the train?

Ramanathan : On the train you know I happened to meet a gentleman who looked like Mr. P U Chinnappa.

Randor Guy : Famous hero of those days.

Ramanathan : Yes. But you know having seen Mr. Chinnappa in black and white I didn't know what his complexion was, and I didn't know any of these film people personally.

Ramanathan : Except for a few whom I had seen. So, I thought he must be P U Chinnappa and I asked, "Are you Mr. P U Chinnappa?" He said, "No, I am M G Chakrapani"

Randor Guy : I see. MGR's brother.

Ramanathan : Yes, he was MGR's brother. and he asked me, "What are you going to Coimbatore for?" I said, "They've asked me to go there for makeup test".

"For what role?"

"As the hero in *My Son*, a film they are going to take..."

"Oh, is that so?"

Well, he looked somewhat depressed. "You see I too have a brother MG Ramachandran. "

Randor Guy : (laughs).

Ramanathan : "Yes they know him very well. He has acted in their films; he has worked in so many films in supporting roles. He has a very nice personality and he is much taller than you and fairer" and so on... I didn't understand the implication, but anyway I took in what he said. "They didn't think of giving him a chance to act as the hero."

Randor Guy : He was complaining. (laughs)

Ramanathan : Yes. (laughs).

Randor Guy : Grumbling. That's life I suppose.

Ramanathan : That's life.

Randor Guy : But naturally, his own brother being involved, while somebody from far off Bombay being called over. Then what happened?

Ramanathan : Then I went over to Coimbatore. They put me up in a restaurant- RHR- Royal Hindu Restaurant. I was staying there. Then I went for a makeup test and Mr. R S Mani was the director of that film. *En Magan My son*. And they were testing me and Mr. D.V. Narayanaswamy.

Randor Guy : The actor?

Ramanathan : The actor.

Randor Guy : He was on the stage at that time.

Ramanathan : He was a stage actor and he was also being tested. My director R S Mani - he was encouraging me. He said, "Don't worry about people around, you just..."

Randor Guy : Who were the people around?

Ramanathan : You know D.V. Narayanaswamy had very good support from people like Mr. N S Krishnan, T A Madhuram...

Randor Guy : They were all there?

Ramanathan : Yes, they were all there. Yes, watching and giving him the encouragement. And they used to call him and they gave him advice and which I felt was...

Randor Guy : Not fair.

Ramanathan : It was not fair. R S Mani on the other hand said, “Don’t worry about all that. you just concentrate on your dialogue and carry on.” So, I did my role, I acted well.

Randor Guy : You were given a scene and asked to enact?

Ramanathan : Enact the scene...

Randor Guy : And emote.

Ramanathan : And perform the gestures and movement. And well I did all those movements and gestures and acting and facial expressions all right. But dialogue you know, somehow, I’m not such a great Tamil scholar or even a Tamil stage artist.

Randor Guy : Flubbed the lines?

Ramanathan : Yes, I flubbed the lines. R S Mani said, “Never mind, don’t worry”. He said I had to shed tears in one of those dialogues, I had to cry and tears would not come. I couldn’t get my tears.” So, R. S. Mani himself read those and tears rolled down his eyes.

Randor Guy : Without glycerin?

Ramanathan : Without glycerin. Even then I couldn’t get out my tears. On the other hand D.V. Narayanaswamy spoke his dialogues perfectly.

Randor Guy : And cried?

Ramanathan : And crying and everything. He was a stage actor.

Randor Guy : I know.

Ramanathan : And so, I thought D.V. Narayanaswamy might get it but action wise, he was very...

Randor Guy : Very stagy?

Ramanathan : Very stagy. I thought anyway he might get it because he'd got such good support and so on but finally neither of us was selected.

Randor Guy : Oh both were rejected?

Ramanathan : Both were rejected.

Randor Guy : D.V. Narayanaswamy as well as you.

Ramanathan : Yes, they saw the rushes and they didn't...

Randor Guy : Who got the role?

Ramanathan : Finally, they booked one N. Krishnamurthy.

Randor Guy : N. Krishnamurthy. The table tennis player.

Ramanathan : Table tennis player.

Randor Guy : Was he a new face at the time?

Ramanathan : No, he was an old- time actor. He had acted right from his boyhood. He belonged to a theatrical family actually.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : His father Mr. Narayanan and his sisters and brothers, everybody used to act those days. I can't recollect the title of those films but they used to be a troop- acting together and singing. He was a very good singer.

Randor Guy : Krishnamurthy?

Ramanathan : Yes. He sang his own songs. In fact...

Randor Guy : This was not his first film.

Ramanathan : No. He had acted earlier in *Madanakamarajan* of Gemini films.

Randor Guy : *Madanakamarajan* Gemini was his latest?

Ramanathan : Earlier.

Randor Guy : Earlier like 1941?

Ramanathan : Yes, somewhere around, yes.

Randor Guy : It was the first film of Gemini Studios.

Ramanathan : Was it their first film?

Randor Guy : Yes, that was their first film.

Ramanathan : I see.

Randor Guy : 1941.

Ramanathan : He acted in that. And even earlier he had acted in some films and finally they booked him and he took on that role as hero. With U R Jeevaratnam as heroine.

Randor Guy : In *My Son* U R Jeevaratnam played the heroine?

Ramanathan : She was the heroine.

Randor Guy : I see. What kind of film was this *My Son*?

Ramanathan : It was actually a war propaganda film.

Randor Guy : What do you mean by war propaganda film?

Ramanathan : You see it was under the British Period at the time and war was on.

Randor Guy : yes.

Ramanathan : And they wanted the studios to take one film on propaganda of war- the British angle of war.

Randor Guy : Compulsorily to be made.

Ramanathan : Compulsorily they had to make a film.

Randor Guy : One film?

Ramanathan : One film. Only then, if they produced the film, they could get more raw film stock.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : If they didn't do that, they wouldn't get the film stock.

Randor Guy : So Jupiter made *My Son* and I think Gemini made *Kannamma En Kadhali*

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And *Burma Rani* was made by T R Sundaram and *Manav Samrakshanam* by K Subramaniam.

Ramanathan : Correct.

Randor Guy : So this was under the war propaganda quota.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Did the pictures do well?

Ramanathan : *My Son* did very well because it was a very economical production. Very cheap

Randor Guy : Was it eleven thousand feet?

Ramanathan : Ten thousand feet.

Randor Guy : Ten thousand feet. Eleven thousand was the length restriction.

Ramanathan : Yes. At the time we had to do it.

Randor Guy : What did you do in.. Now that you were rejected and Krishnamurthy was taken to play against Jeevaratnam, what did you do in Coimbatore?

Ramanathan : I was suddenly depressed and disappointed because I had lost my job and...

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : No income and didn't know what to do. Then R S Mani realized my plight and said, "Don't worry. You can be my assistant director and you can work with me." I said, "No I want to be an actor. I'm not interested being an assistant director, I don't want to be a director I want to act!"

Randor Guy : I see. Gary Cooper.

Ramanathan : Gary Cooper was still in my mind. And Y V Rao. And he said, "Don't worry. You can also have a role in this film and slowly you can come up." And so finally I worked as an assistant director in this film.

00:42:58-00:46:22

Randor Guy : And talking of R S Mani, was he already an established director at that time when he made *My Son*?

Ramanathan : Yes, he was. Because he started out with his film *Kannagi*.

Randor Guy : Oh *Kannagi* was his first film?

Ramanathan : His first film.

Randor Guy : He was an editor earlier.

Ramanathan : He was an editor. Actually, at that time Mr. Boman Irani was directing that film. He started the film under Boman Irani. And somehow, they found that his direction was not good enough and of course R S Mani volunteered, he said, "I'll do it"

Randor Guy : So he was already editing the film?

Ramanathan : He was editing that film.

Randor Guy : He was a full time editor at Jupiter at that time?

Ramanathan : Yes, at that time...

Randor Guy : So he came into Tamil films as an editor.

Ramanathan : As an editor.

Randor Guy : That was in the beginning.

Ramanathan : He had already started his career as editor in Modern theatres.

Randor Guy : Earlier?

Ramanathan : Earlier. And later on, him being a very good film editor they gave him the opportunity to direct that film.

Randor Guy : So *Kannagi* was his first film?

Ramanathan : His first film.

Randor Guy : Why I'm asking is, in some of the early advertisements of *Kannagi* which I've seen in some of the old film magazines, the name of the young Somasundaram also appears, 'Direction- R S Mani and young Somasundaram'.

Ramanathan : (laughs) yes.

Randor Guy : Was it just in name or was he contributing anything?

Ramanathan : No, you see young Somasundaram at that time was more famous as a producer...

Randor Guy : Than R S Mani.

Ramanathan : And a proprietor, partner of Jupiter pictures than R S Mani was. R S Mani at that time was only an editor.

Randor Guy : So he was not known.

Ramanathan : He was not known at all. So, people knew Somasundaram better than R S Mani. He was very popular.

Randor Guy : I remember he did not contribute creatively.

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : He was not fit enough.

Ramanathan : No. He was not concerned about film craft at all. He was only concerned about money.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : Yes. And naturally he put his name and R S Mani's name in that.

Randor Guy : And *Kannagi* was the film in which Kannaamba scored very highly.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And Elangovan...

Ramanathan : Elangovan's dialogues.

Randor Guy : Now talking of *Kannagi*, you were not connected with *Kannagi*. You were not in Jupiter Pictures.

Ramanathan : No, I wasn't.

Randor Guy : I see. So, you don't know anything about *Kannagi*?

Ramanathan : No, I don't know anything.

Randor Guy : Why I'm asking is Mr. Raghunath, T. R. Raghunath the director, who is the younger brother of Raja Chandrashekar, he once told me when we were once chatting about films at the Adyar Film Institute...that he directed *Kannagi*.

Ramanathan : Who? Raghunath?

Randor Guy : Raghunath. But his name does not appear and I did not want to confront him or say anything. Later when I had an occasion to talk to S V Saharanamam, who I believe was the assistant director in *Kannagi*, he had a role in *Kannagi*, he also worked on the directorial side I understand, he told me, he (Raghunath) was called to direct some of the dance sequences of *Kannagi*.

Ramanathan : Ah, that may be.

Randor Guy : Especially the scene where Madhavi, the vamp...M S Saroja...And that was how Raghunath met Saroja who later on became Mrs. Raghunath.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : This was what Sahasranamam told me..

Ramanathan : That could be true because I too have a faint recollection of this after you told me...somebody had told me that he also...

Randor Guy : This is what Saharanamam told me at that time.

00:46:23-00:52:17

Randor Guy : Now you continue this *En Magan- My Son* story.

Ramanathan : Yes, *En Magan...*

Randor Guy : So you joined R S Mani as an assistant director?

Ramanathan : As assistant director and also, I acted in the picture.

Randor Guy : What role did you play?

Ramanathan : I come as the hero's friend in the campaign against the Japanese.

Randor Guy : Who were the other artists of this *My Son*? Apart from Jeevarathnam, N. Krishnamurthy and you, do you recall who the other artists were?

Ramanathan : Yes. Mr. D. Balasubramaniam who was a very famous actor.

Randor Guy : Character actor...

Ramanathan : He acted as the father and he scored very well in that film and there was one, I think it's Radha, she acted as the mother.

Randor Guy : Radha?

Ramanathan : Yes, I think Radha her name is.

Randor Guy : Radhabai?

Ramanathan : Radha Bai! M M Radhabai!

Randor Guy : Who used to do mother's roles.

Ramanathan : Yes. She acted in that film. Then this Nat Annaji Rao acted in a small role.

Randor:Sunderajan's hero.

Ramanathan : (laughs) he was the hero at one time. He acted in this film. And so many others I can't remember.

Randor Guy : Was there any comedy scene as such in that?

Ramanathan : Yes, we had a comedian that was K. R. Venugopal Sharma.

Randor Guy : The man you are talking about K R V Sharma- comedian?

Ramanathan : He was the comedian; he wrote the comedy dialogue also

Randor Guy : Who wrote the dialogues for *My Son*?

Ramanathan : A S A Sami.

Randor Guy : That was his first attempt?

Ramanathan : First film.

Randor Guy : As a dialogue writer, that was his entry into cinema?

Ramanathan : Entry, yes. We both joined together. Same time. And music wise it was S V Venkatraman.

Randor Guy : Music Director? He scored the music?

Ramanathan : He scored the music. And lyrics were by Papanasam Sivan.

Randor Guy : I see. And when you joined Jupiter, what period was this? 1942-43 or?

Ramanathan : 1943.

Randor:'43?

Ramanathan : Yes. Or 1944, I think.

Randor Guy : I see. 1944, is it? *My Son*.

Ramanathan : 1944, yes.

Randor Guy : And when you joined Jupiter in 1944, do you remember who the other artists were? I believe there were a number of people on the rolls on full time basis.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Do you remember any of their names who were there - Actors, actresses, technicians, who worked with you in Jupiter?

Ramanathan : In the studios?

Randor Guy : In the studios.

Ramanathan : Oh, they were taking 3 films at that time.

Randor Guy : What were the other films?

Ramanathan : One of them was *Sri Murugan*.

Randor Guy : *Sri Murugan*?

Ramanathan : Yes. And another was *Valmiki*

Randor Guy : With Honnappa Bhagavatar and T R Rajakumari.

Ramanathan : Yes. And another was this *My Son*. And *Sri Murugan* of course was initially started off by Mr. Raja Chandrashekar as director.

Randor Guy : *Sri Murugan*?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : When you say 'initially' what happened?

Ramanathan : Later on, there was some difference of opinion between him and the producers.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : And he left. And we had people like Dr. O R Balu, Trichi.

Randor Guy : Was an amateur (inaudible)

Ramanathan : Yes. Famous (inaudible)

Randor Guy : I believe he played Surapadman. That is what A S A Sami told me.

Ramanathan : Yes exactly. He was a very good friend of mine. Whenever I felt uncomfortable, he used to treat me.

Randor Guy : (laughs). He was an amateur actor. Who was interested in (inaudible)

Ramanathan : Amateur actor. Who closed his clinic for the sake of coming down to Coimbatore to act in that role.

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : He said, ' I don't mind losing all that money. I want to act in this role'.

Randor Guy : (laughs) And who played Murugan?

Ramanathan : Murugan was done by Honnappa Bhagavathar. And MGR as a young... Early Murugan was done by one Baby Harini.

Randor Guy : That is the comedian Vadiraj's sister.

Ramanathan : Was she?

Randor Guy : Yes, who later on became a heroine in Kannada. Vadiraj-Jawahar were big producers in Kannada. A good friend of mine.

Ramanathan : Their sister? She was the early Murugan and Honnappa Bhagavathar was the elder Murugan.

Randor Guy : And MGR played Paramasivam.

Ramanathan : Yes, he did Paramasivam.

Randor Guy : Lord Shiva.

Ramanathan : And he did Rudrathandavam.

Randor Guy : Rudrathandavam?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : This A S A Sami talked about...

Ramanathan : And Malathi played Parvathi.

Randor Guy : Telugu actress?

Ramanathan : Telugu actress.

Randor Guy : And when you say three films were under production at the same time, I suppose Jupiter was a very active and big company at that time?

Ramanathan : Yes, they were very active. Even they rented out studios.

Randor Guy : I see. How many floors did they have there in the studios?

Ramanathan : If I remember right, I think there were three floors. Two or three floors yes.

Randor Guy : I see. And it had its own lab?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : What about song recording? There or in Madras?

Ramanathan : No, it was all done there. In Coimbatore. S M Subbaiah Naidu was the Music Director and M S Viswanathan was also one of the assistants.

Randor Guy : One of the famous music directors...

Ramanathan : Yes. And what I recall is this MG Ramachandran did a lot to get into that Rudrathandavam. Practice and so on. The rehearsals.

Randor Guy : He was practicing?

Ramanathan : He was very keen on getting a name in that film.

Randor Guy : I see. Who were the other artists at that time with roles?

Ramanathan : Other actresses- T. R. Rajakumari was acting in Valmiki.

Randor Guy : Who directed Valmiki?

Ramanathan : Sundar Rao Nadkarni.

Randor Guy : Sundar Rao Nadkarni?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He was directing Valmiki? So, there were 3 directors working at the same time?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Raja Chandrashekhar, R S Mani and Sundar Rao Nadkarni. Then Raja Chandrashekar left, and I think *Murugan* ...Sami took over?

Ramanathan : No, one Mr. V S Narayanan who is the brother-in-law of...

Randor Guy : Bhanumati

Ramanathan : Bhanumati, he was given an opportunity to direct that film and I was made the associate director.

Randor Guy : I see. Sami did not direct it?

Ramanathan : No. He wrote the dialogue.

Randor Guy : That's all?

Ramanathan : Yes.

00:52:18-00:57:24

Randor Guy : I see. Can you tell something about this U. R. Jeevaratnam? Did you know her well during the making of...? You must have known her...

Ramanathan : Yes, I knew her, she was working in our film.

Randor Guy : She later on married T. S. Venkataswami, production manager.

Ramanathan : He was manager of (inaudible)

Randor Guy : Can you tell me something about Jeevaratnam?

Ramanathan : Well, she is the daughter of one Kunjammaal from Unjalur.

Randor Guy : Unjalur, Kunjammaal.

Ramanathan : She... that's why U R Jeevaratnam. I don't know what the R stands for but U R Jeevaratnam.

Randor Guy : What was this Kunjammaal?

Ramanathan : She was her mother.

Randor Guy : Was she a singer, dancer?

Ramanathan : I don't think she was that. And U R Jeevaratnam was a very good singer, a very famous singer. And she was very soft spoken.

Randor Guy : She's still alive?

Ramanathan : Yes, she's very much alive. And as far as acting is concerned, she was that type... you know in those days they had a particular type of acting.

Randor Guy : Stagy.

Ramanathan : Stagy type.

Randor Guy : Broad gestures. Loud.

Ramanathan : Yes. (Inaudible)*Chintamani* ...

Randor Guy : Still artificial?

Ramanathan : Still artificial.

Randor Guy : That continues even today. (laughs)

Ramanathan : (laughs). Anyway, she was a good singer.

Randor Guy : I see. That M N Nambiar was there at that time?

Ramanathan : No, he came in later because they were... Sakthi Nadaga Sabha was performing some of their plays in Coimbatore and all these actors - Nambiar and T R Sahadevan and M S S Bhagyam and S. V. Subbaiah and S A Natarajan. All these people were acting on stage.

Randor Guy : Sakthi Naadaga Sabha?

Ramanathan : Sakthi Naadaga Sabha.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : They were acting on the stage. The dialogue writer was S. D. Sundharam.

Randor Guy : *Kaviyin Kanavu?*

Ramanathan : *Kaviyin Kanavu.*

Randor Guy : So you saw his plays.

Ramanathan : *Kaviyin Kanavu* and all his plays would be performed. So, you know, in these three films he had 3 assistant directors including myself.

Randor Guy : Who were the two others?

Ramanathan : One I remember was one Murthy and the other... *Murugan* of course after Chandrashekhar left, I was the associate director and the producers used to tell us whenever we were free to go and see those plays. And give them an opinion of the performances of those actors and actresses.

Randor Guy : So they were always looking for talent.

Ramanathan : Yes. So, we used to go and see the plays. And almost everyone voted, for M N Nambiar, then S A Natarajan and S. V. Subbaiah and M S S Bhagyam and V R Sahadevan.

Randor Guy : They all became noted actors...

Ramanathan : Then they were taken in by Jupiter Pictures on a monthly salary. And they had to act in any film as on a contract.

Randor Guy : They were there on call.

Ramanathan : And they were staying at a lodge and M S was there and so on... Stay there and... And they were called and everyone used to act and M N Nambiar of course did very well. It so happened that his makeup test was supposed to be the next day, he came the previous day, wanted a place to stay in the quarters at Central Studios and the manager of course said, "I don't know, there's only one place- you can ask Ramanathan, he's staying alone"

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : Yes. "So, if he says all right, then you can stay with him for the night and then go for a test tomorrow." He was brought and I said, "By all means". I was sleeping on a cot and there was no other space. There was only a mat which I laid down on the floor and he slept. Not even slept- he started off asking me how he should act and perform.

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : Because he said, "I'm basically a stage actor. I've only done some film..."

Randor Guy : *Ramdass?*

Ramanathan : Some *Rajamanickam* (inaudible)." I don't know anything about this. So please guide me- you're an assent director, I hear that you're quite well known here, so can you tell me? "

I said, "I've seen you in *Kaviyin Kanavu* on stage, it's perfectly alright, you're very nice. But all that is very exaggerated- your expression, gestures, loud voice - it's alright for the stage. But in

the film the camera is different- you have got to reduce all that completely- till the lowest minimum and gradually build up your expressions”. He asked me, “How? Should it be this way or that way?”

Randor Guy : So he acted and showed you?

Ramanathan : Showed me. And I said, “Reduce it further. You see you’re used to this for so many years it is very difficult but still you have to reduce it. Bring it down. He finally got it down. And somehow when he said, “I’ll never forget you. It’s great that I met you.” So I said, “No you’ve got your talent to help you, to push you through.”

Randor Guy : At the right time. He went a long way

Ramanathan : And he went a long way. One of the leading actors of South India. Then of course others came along. In fact, T K S Bhagavati used to perform earlier also.

Randor Guy : In that same studio?

Ramanathan : Not under Jupiter, but in the same studio.

00:57:25-01:00:00

Randor Guy : And what happened after this *My Son*?

Ramanathan : After *My Son* you see what happened was, towards the end of that film there was some disagreement between R S Mani the director and the producer Somasundaram over some financial complication, some problems... and he also had some ailment.

Randor Guy : Asthmatic patient.

Ramanathan : Yes, asthmatic patient. He left for his place near Salem and they wondered what to do. Then Somasundaram asked me, “You have got the script of this film and there are certain scenes to be taken in Cochin harbour and...”

Randor Guy : Outdoor?

Outdoor Cochin harbour and a song by Baby Kamala.

Randor Guy : Dancer? Now Kumari.

Ramanathan : Dance. “So, whatever remaining in the script has to be done”. I said, “First you have to consult R S Mani”. He said, “Go and see him, ask him.”

Randor Guy : Where was R S Mani at the time?

Ramanathan : He was in his village called Paramathi Velur in Salem.

Randor Guy : Paramathi Velur in Salem, Village.

Ramanathan : Yes. Away from Salem. So, they had to cross the river in the *parisal*.

Randor: The swirling boat.

Ramanathan : Yes. So as instructed by these people I went and saw him. And he was really bad, not alright physically, health-wise. He said, “I’m not coming, I won’t be able to come for some few months. I’ve been asked to take some rest. I’m on a treatment”. So, I came back and told them. They said, “Alright these scenes are to be taken, you better do something about it- you are the associate director, why don’t you direct all those things?” I said, “Alright I’ll do it” And then I had to make arrangements for all the sequences to be taken in Cochin through the commander of the Naval establishments.

Randor Guy : You had some connection from your...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And one question- because the war was on at that time, were there no security restrictions of shooting in a naval base and all that?

Ramanathan : Well, it was all well protected you know and everybody couldn't go in. See these are all examined you see... When we went into the area, of course there was security, but since the Commander had already given instructions, clear signal, and we were all quite safe

Randor Guy : I see, so you could do the shoot.

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : And who directed those sequences?

Ramanathan : Well, I had already planned the shots for those.

Randor Guy : And who was the cameraman?

Ramanathan : Cameraman ...

01:00:01-01:02:01

Randor Guy : We were talking about the artists on monthly salary who were working at Jupiter.

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : You told us about Mr. Nambiar.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And then U R Jeevaratnam. Were there others?

Ramanathan : Yes, there were so many others, from *Sakthi Naadaga Sabha* we had S V Subbaiah...

Randor Guy : S. V. Subbaiah, was it his first film with Jupiter?

Ramanathan : Yes, first time he acted in a Jupiter film.

Randor Guy : Which film was that, do you remember?

Ramanathan : Well, I remember there was one film called *Abhimanyu*- because I directed the Maya Bazar sequences.

Randor Guy : In *Abhimanyu*?

Ramanathan : In *Abhimanyu*. When Kasilingam the director had to go away for some domestic matters. I directed the Maya Bazar sequence in that film. I knew V Subbaiah played the role of Shakuni.

Randor Guy : The wily uncle in Mahabharata.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And M G Ramachandran acted as Arjuna. Abhimanyu was S M Kumaresan and Jeevarathnam was Uttara.

Ramanathan : Yes. Uttara.

Randor Guy : And I was in school when I saw this film *Abhimanyu* in Nellore and *Vasanthamaame Vaazhvile* was a very famous song because she had to appear again and again in that... making of flower garlands and things like that.

Ramanathan : Exactly.

Randor Guy : What has happened to this Kumaresan? He seemed to have faded afterwards.

Ramanathan : Yes, he was the hero in *Abhimanyu*.

Randor Guy : He made one or two other films. *Dhana Amaravathy* or something like that.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And he was not heard of after that.. And after this *En Magan* what was the film, you were involved with in Jupiter directly?

Ramanathan : You mean in Jupiter pictures or elsewhere?

Randor Guy : Jupiter pictures. You said in the end, there were some problems, you went to Cochin and you directed those scenes. Am I right?

Ramanathan : Yes, Cochin harbour.

Randor Guy : Because money was thick. And after that what happened?

01:02:02-01:11:23

Ramanathan : After that the picture was over and then R S Mani was engaged by Namagiri Lena Chettiar.

Randor Guy : The famous Lena of Krishna Pictures.

Ramanathan : Krishna Pictures. I was actually...

Randor Guy : Was he already a successful producer at that time?

Ramanathan : Who?

Randor Guy : Lena?

Ramanathan : Oh yes, he had done a lot of films. I think he had done some film with Honnappa Bhagavatar and S P L Dhanalakshmi called *Prabhavati*.

Randor Guy : *Prabhavati* was a Krishna Pictures film.

Ramanathan : Krishna Pictures. And *Krishnan Thoodhu* in which Kannaamba acted.

Randor Guy : Yes. It was her first film.

Ramanathan : Whose film?

Randor Guy : Kannaamba's.

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : In Tamil.

Ramanathan : Tamil, I don't know.

Randor Guy : Yes. That was her first film.

Ramanathan : I think so. Maybe. Because Lena was producer in Krishna...

Randor Guy : Yes that was her first film then the second film in which she made her name was *Ashok Kumar* in 1941..

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Then came *Kannagi*.

Ramanathan : Ah Yes.

Randor Guy : That was her chronology.

Ramanathan : Yes correct.

Randor Guy : Her first film in Telugu was *Harishchandra* in 1935 which was made by Star Combines Ramayya directed by P. Pullaiah and somebody called Rajopadhyay - it's a new name. Do you remember a director called Rajopadhyay. Somebody from Bombay or Calcutta?

Ramanathan : No, I don't recollect.

Randor Guy : Anyway coming back to your story, you were talking about Lena Chettiar. Where was he at that time in Madras?

Ramanathan : Who?

Randor Guy : Lena Chettiar

Ramanathan : He was in Krishna Pictures; he was the man running Krishna Pictures.

Randor Guy : His office was on Thanikachalam Street.

Ramanathan : Thanikachalam Chetty Street, yes.

Randor Guy : Today it has disappeared. Now it's just a block of flats. But anyway, I think a Krishna temple is still there.

Ramanathan : Still there. Yes.

Randor Guy : Where marriages are still performed.

Ramanathan : And he was a devout follower of Krishna. And R S Mani wrote to me asking me to come over to Madras as his assistant director for Krishna Pictures where he had been...

Randor Guy : When was this? Which year was this?

Ramanathan : I think after 1945.

Randor Guy : 1945?

Ramanathan : Yes. And he asked me to come over. Of course, I had been promised better pay and a place to stay and I took it. I came over. And we were actually starting to write the story for that film.

Randor Guy : For what film was this?

Ramanathan : *Krishna Bhakti.*

Randor Guy : *Krishna Bhakti?*

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : So it was started as early as 1945. I think it came out only sometime in '48-49.

S. Ramanathan:'49.

Randor:'49. I remember seeing this as a school boy at Broadway Talkies.

Ramanathan : Yes. And we had already planned the story. He had a skeleton of the story- R S Mani and then he wanted to go somewhat deeper into it.

Randor Guy : What was the skeleton he had in his mind?

Ramanathan : He wanted to have a '*Kabada Sanyasi*' you know.

Randor Guy : Something like Rasputin?

Ramanathan : No, he didn't have the idea of Rasputin that time in his mind. I gave him that idea.

Randor Guy : You gave him the idea of Rasputin...

Ramanathan : But he had a sort of a '*Kabada Sanyasi*', who was a...

Randor Guy : Fake.

Ramanathan : Fake.

Randor Guy : What they call a 'whited sepulchre'?

Ramanathan : Yes. And he was trying to exploit women.

Randor Guy : Wolf in a sheep's clothing.

Ramanathan : (laughs). He had that idea.

Randor Guy : That kind of character...

Ramanathan : That kind of character and he wanted P U Chinnappa to act in that in the film.

Randor Guy : Was he inspired by any novel, story or film? Or just one of his ideas?

Ramanathan : Just one of his ideas.

Randor Guy : Just like that?

Ramanathan : Yes, just like that. He had a bare skeleton. Then he told me his idea and said, “You’ll have to sit with it” and he got permission from Lena Chettiar at his expense to go to Bangalore.

Randor Guy : To do the story he went to Bangalore?

Ramanathan : Yes. All the way to Bangalore. He stayed there in Bangalore in Malleshwaram.

Randor Guy : I see. For writing this story and doing nothing else?

Ramanathan : Nothing else

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : Only for the purpose of this story. Lena Chettiar was very liberal man, very generous.

Randor Guy : He used to spend on all that.

Ramanathan : Spend on all that. He wanted a very good picture that’s all. And he had great faith in R S Mani as a director.

Randor Guy : To interrupt you, these days, people have this habit of going to five star hotel rooms here there or elsewhere just for writing the story, and now you tell me even in 1945 you went all the way to Bangalore to write this.. just to write the story. You and Mr. R S Mani.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Was this kind of practice in existence at that time? People going out, sitting somewhere, doing the story and then coming back?

Ramanathan : It was not a general practice as such. You see people might be going, but then generally it wasn't followed as a custom. And not as frequent as it is happening now. This was one of those rare cases because we wanted solitude, we wanted to be away from disturbance and we wanted to concentrate only on the story and nothing else.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : We didn't go there for any other pleasures or anything like that. No. Climate was also better than in Madras and we had all the facilities then.

Randor Guy : You took a house or you were staying in a hotel?

Ramanathan : We were staying in a hotel, Krishna Vilas.

Randor Guy : In Malleshwaram?

Ramanathan : In Malleshwaram. And stayed there.

Randor Guy : Only the two of you?

Ramanathan : Only both of us.

Randor Guy : And how did you work on this script? Can you explain it in a little more detail? Or what were you doing exactly in Bangalore? How did you work, how did your day go on?

Ramanathan : Oh, it used to be a regular day. Every day it was just like going to an office, from morning to night, with breaks in between, it was continuous process.

Randor Guy : Was the writing done in English or Tamil or what was the procedure you followed those days?

Ramanathan : I used to write in English and he used to give his ideas.

Randor Guy : So he will go on talking?

Ramanathan : Yes, he used to go on talking.

Randor Guy : And you used to write down and add your suggestions...

Ramanathan : And my suggestions.

Randor Guy : After discussion?

Ramanathan : Yes, in English. And then we used to also visit the cine halls.

Randor Guy : Go and see movies?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : What kind of movies...looking for ideas?

Ramanathan : Looking for ideas. We went and saw this *Parbat Pe Apna Dera*, that is Shantaram's. With Ulhas and Vasanthi I think.

Randor Guy : *Parbat Pe Apna Dera?* That was also something about some religious...

Ramanathan : Not religious. Somewhat related to this 'wolf in a sheep's clothing'. That suited this film.

Randor Guy : It was a very successful film of Shantaram.

Ramanathan : Yes, it was. And he had some ideas from there. And apart from that we had so many other ideas also and combined all that and came out with a story. We took some time over it and completed it.

Randor Guy : There was no inspiration from some American film or was there?

Ramanathan : Well later on, when we came back to Madras...

Randor Guy : So after you finished this writing the initial first stage of the story, you had a first draft.

Ramanathan : Yes. After we came back to Madras, we collected more material also. For instance, I went on to Moore Market and found a book called...

Randor Guy : Moore Market was very much in existence.

Ramanathan : Yes. It was very popular.

Randor Guy : A fire destroyed it.

Yes. Renault's novels and so on. And I found an unusual book called 'The Monk'.

Randor Guy : Do you remember who wrote it?

Ramanathan : It was some French author. I can't recollect the name. But it was not a very popular book. But it had some characteristics, the character was very similar to the one that...

Randor Guy : What you were planning?

Ramanathan : Yes. And the passages and the dialogues in that were very good. It was written in English and it was very good. So, we took that. I marked certain passages and got R S Mani's approval and we collected all that and wrote them out separately. And then someone said there was a film called *Gaslight* going on at the Casino.

Randor Guy : George Cukor's.

Ramanathan : George Cukor with Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman. I think she got an award for it.

Randor Guy : Yeah, a very famous film.

Ramanathan : Yes. And I said somebody told me it's good- why don't we go and see...so we went and...

Randor Guy : Where was this running?

Ramanathan : It was being shown at Minerva.

Randor Guy : Minerva?

Ramanathan : Yes. One Mr. Ramachandran was there.

Randor Guy : C G Ramachandran.

Ramanathan : Yes. He was there. And we saw that film. And really it was a marvelous film and then I said, 'There's lot of stuff in this!'. Then he said, "Yes I think so too. We'll see it again and again". So, we used to go there and see almost every day.

Randor Guy : Every day you were seeing *Gaslight*? Did that film have a similar storyline?

Ramanathan : No, that character you know of Charles Boyer, was....

Randor Guy : Was a crook.

Ramanathan : A crook in the end. The early part where he tries not to betray his real character...

Randor Guy : I've not seen the film. I've only heard about it, read about it.

Ramanathan : Yes. That part of it was there and finally he is exposed. But the way he posed himself was very innocent right from the beginning. That part of it had so many angles. R S Mani said, "Do you know why he is doing this at some later stage, or this at the earlier stage? Because he is going to do that at the very end".

Randor Guy : Planted at the beginning.

Ramanathan : Planted in the beginning and so on. So, all those things we collected. And of course, we sat there in the theatre itself and took notes.

Randor Guy : (laughs)

Ramanathan : Ramachandran was good enough to give us a place with some light.

Randor Guy : In a corner?

Ramanathan : Yes. I used to write even the dialogues. Because we didn't have a recorder or anything.

Randor Guy : Those days there was no recorder.

Ramanathan : Yes, so we took it all down. So, we had to go and see it again and again. That was also very helpful.

01:11:24-01:21:44

Randor Guy : Who actually wrote the script of *Krishna Bhakti*? Who was the scriptwriter or the writer for *Krishna Bhakti*?

Ramanathan : Well actually they had several writers.

Randor Guy : Like who?

Ramanathan : Like you know Mr. Sandilyan, the late Sandilyan.

Randor Guy : Famous Tamil writer?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Who died recently.

Ramanathan : He wrote certain sequences. And Ku Pa Sethu Ammal.

Randor Guy : She was a known writer.

Ramanathan : Very famous writer. Sister of Ku Pa Rajagopalan.

Randor Guy : Famous short story writer.

Ramanathan : Yes, because she could write about women- the wife's angle.

Randor Guy : Women's angle.

Ramanathan : Women's angle. S P L Dhanalaskhmi was acting in the role of the wife. Her dialogues were written by Ku Pa Sethu Ammal. And then from 'Monk', you know that book...

Randor Guy : That famous novel!

Ramanathan : We took certain passages and gave them to Sri Sudhananda Bharathi.

Randor Guy : In Pondicherry?

Ramanathan : Pondicherry, yes. He gave the translations for that.

Randor Guy : He was a very famous Tamil Scholar.

Ramanathan : Oh yes, he was. And then we had S D S Yogi, the man who made *Luck-Adhirshyam*. Later on, he wrote certain sequences which we felt he was the right man for.

Randor Guy : I see. What kind of sequences were they?

Ramanathan : Well, anything to do with sexual impulses if you might call that.

Randor Guy : He was an expert, was he?

Ramanathan : Well, he used to write on that.

Randor Guy : (laughs).

Ramanathan : He used to write on that. And I as assistant director had to collect all these dialogues from people. Sandilyan was very prompt, Sudhananda Bharathi was very prompt and Ku Pa Sethu Ammal...of course R S Mani himself used to get from her. And as for S D S Yogi, I had to go and trouble him every other day.

Randor Guy : He was a slow writer?

Ramanathan : Very slow. But he was a very good writer.

Randor Guy : I know he was.

Ramanathan : Very talented. Very slow.

Randor Guy : '*Bala Bharati*', they used to call him. Very jovial also.

Ramanathan : And I said, "Look here we can't go on like this. How many days am I to come? Chettiar is worried, and everybody is worried. So, he said "Alright I'll give you the dialogues tomorrow. All the dialogues, all the sequences." I said, "I don't think I can believe you".

Randor Guy : Wanted to see the proof?

Ramanathan : So many pages of dialogue to be written. Overnight. In one night. He said, "You don't worry I'll do it". And next morning I went there at 10 o' Clock.

Randor Guy : Where was he staying?

Ramanathan : He was staying at Old Woodlands.

Randor Guy : Royapettah Woodlands.

Ramanathan : Yes, Royapettah Woodlands.

Randor Guy : So he was staying in a lodge?

Ramanathan : Yes. Provided by the company.

Randor Guy : Oh, provided by the company to write dialogues.

Ramanathan : Yes. And when I went there, the door was ajar and I found him lying there, with only a sheet over him. And I asked him, “What Sir, what’s happening?” and he woke up and said, “Oh I had a bit of a late night”. And I found the whole floor of that room strewn with papers.

Randor Guy : Sheets of papers.

Ramanathan : Sheets and sheets of paper. I picked them up and found them all to be dialogues.

Randor Guy : I see. Written during the night.

Ramanathan : Yes, all written during the night. Maybe a hundred pages.

Randor Guy : I see. Big work.

Ramanathan : Terrific work. I don’t know how he did it. “Sir, all your dialogues are there. Right up to the sequences you had asked me to do. Further dialogues later on I’ll write it”. “Oh, thank you very much indeed. How did you do it all? All in one night?” “Oh, that’s a secret!”.

Randor Guy : (laughs).

Ramanathan : So, he had days like that.

Randor Guy : And whose name appeared int the credit titles as the writer? Do you remember? In *Krishna Bhakthi? Kadhai, vasanam* they write you know... Story, dialogue...

Ramanathan : Dialogue of course they had all these names.

Randor Guy : All the names.

Ramanathan : Yes. *Kadhai* I don't think we had any...I don't think.

Randor Guy : Where was the *Krishna Bhakti* shot?

Ramanathan : It was shot in Newtowne studios.

Randor Guy : In Kilpauk. Today it doesn't exist of course.

Ramanathan : Yes. And we had that Marcus Bartley...

Randor Guy : He was the cameraman?

Ramanathan : Started, yes.

Randor Guy : Started? Later on, he left?

Ramanathan : Later on, he had to go to Vauhini.

Randor Guy : I see. And who took over from Bartley?

Ramanathan : There was one Kumar who was assistant cameraman.

Randor Guy : Kumar?

Ramanathan : Kumar. He took over. He did the remaining part of it.

Randor Guy : Who was the music director of it?

Ramanathan : We had several.

Randor Guy : Like?

Ramanathan : Like S V Venkataraman. G Ramanathan. Songs were quite melodious in *Krishna Bhakti*.

Randor Guy : Yes.

Ramanathan : Some of them were that *Ellorum Nallavarae and Saarasam*

Randor:*Saarasam!* It's supposed to be a very sexy song.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Sung by P. U Chinnappa. They all became famous and all that *Katha Kalakshebam*, the long sequence done by Chinnappa.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Can you tell us something about that?

Ramanathan : Yes, that *Kalakshebam*, you see the lyrics were written by Udumalai Narayana Kavi.

Randor Guy : Famous poet and lyricist.

Ramanathan : Lyricist who was very close to...

Randor Guy : N S Krishnan.

Ramanathan : And he wrote lyrics for that *Kalakshebam* and of course the music was set up, I think by S V Venkatraman and he didn't record it separately or use any playback or anything like that. It was shot direct.

Randor Guy : So, he did all the singing directly on the set, instruments and all? Chinnappa did?

Ramanathan : Chinnappa did.

Randor Guy : With all the instruments?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : I think S V S Narayan played the Mridangam.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He was himself a professional Mridangam player.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : I see, that was a great feat!

Ramanathan : Yes, a feat to achieve for P U Chinnappa. Direct take it was. The Katha Kalakshebam was very popular.

Randor Guy : I know it was very popular. I have a cassette recording of it. Audiocassette. Because I saw this *Krishna Bhakti* as a schoolboy in Broadway and these songs, especially this *Kalakshebam* is very much green in my memory. When I went for one of my shootings in Madurai, I picked up an audiotape of Chinnappa. I occasionally listen to it.

Ramanathan : *Saarasam...*

Randor Guy : Yes *Saarasam* and *Ellorum Nallavarae*, these were all the famous songs. I think K R Ramaswamy played Krishna.

Ramanathan : Krishna, yes.

Randor Guy : I remember he did that. With Periyanyaki as Satyabhama.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Am I right?

Ramanathan : Yes exactly.

Randor Guy : And I also remember one song by Periyanyaki...*Podi, podi bhoomiyin maele Satyabhamaiyai pol undo...*

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : You remember that song? I remember that song very well.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : How did that Krishna and all that come into this Rasputin thing? You wanted it deliberately like that?

Ramanathan : That was deliberately added.

Randor Guy : Just to turn it into a kind of a folk mix? And N. S. Krishnan was also there?

Ramanathan : Yes, he was also there. T A Madhuran and all those people.

Randor Guy : And there is one young girl who appears in that picture. She was probably in her early teens.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : If I remember right, she comes as the daughter of N S K and Madhuram. There is a comedy sequence where this young girl who is just into her teens is taught a dance number - with highly erotic words or content to which the father objects. That was the theme of the comedy and finally the teacher who teaches all this erotic poetry to a young girl is beaten up by a crowd. Do you remember?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : That sequence is very much green in my memory. Some 30 odd years ago.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Was that girl Jyothi Lakshmi by any chance?

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : Who was that girl?

Ramanathan : Actually, I can't remember the identity.

Randor Guy : You don't remember the sequence? The dance, the comedy sequence?

Ramanathan : No. Because, certain of these scenes were taken separately.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : N S Krishnan...

Randor Guy : Oh, he used to direct his own scenes, write his own scenes. I'm told the director was never bothered about...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He did not want them to bother about... So he did it himself and edit it himself and he must have done it that way.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And C S Jayaraman also played a role like that.

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : Can you tell me something about him?

Ramanathan : Yes, he had done films earlier. I remember *Krishna Leela* of those days.

Randor Guy : It was in the 1930s.

Ramanathan : Somewhere in the 30s. He did Krishna.

Randor Guy : He was a good singer.

Ramanathan : Very good singer.

Randor Guy : He had a kind of tremor in the voice. Melodious tremor

Ramanathan : And he had sort of S G Kittappa style.

Randor Guy : Style of singing.

Ramanathan : In between some of his films, he was not very active. Then Lena Chettiar knew him and called him and gave him this opportunity to act in this film.

Randor Guy : I think even the title song is sung by him. *Mohana Murali*...

Ramanathan : Yes. (sings)

Randor Guy : Am I right?

Ramanathan : (sings)

Ramanathan : In fact, there was this small conversation by N S Krishnan when he was sitting in the lawn of Newtown Studios. Chidambaram Jayaraman was supposed to have given that music. You were asking about the music director- he was also one of them.

Randor Guy : He was also one of them?

Ramanathan : Yes. And this was also one of his tunes.

Randor Guy : It was not the original?

Ramanathan : No not it is not the original.

Randor Guy : Because (inaudible) was sung by M S Subbulakshmi earlier.

Ramanathan : That's what I'm coming to. So, N S Krishnan asked Chidambaram Jayaraman, "You have written, you have composed music... a tune for this song. And you call yourself a music director? Isn't this a copy from somewhere else? If you want to be a music director, you should compose your own tune."

Randor Guy : Original.

Ramanathan : “It should be an original,” he said. Then Chidambaram Jayaraman said, “It is a very popular tune and it would be a hit, so I did it.”

Randor Guy : And I think Jayaraman was the brother in law of Karunanidhi.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor : Kalaingar Mr. Karunanidhi. Was Karunanidhi already in Jupiter when he was there?

Ramanathan : Yes. I had finished *My Son En Magan* and I was actually free; I was not working for some time...No, I was doing this *Abhimanyu*.

01:21:45-01:29:47

Randor Guy : You were telling... That’s what I’m coming back to.

Ramanathan : Yes. *Abhimanyu* sequences. Maya Bazar sequences. The trick shot.

Randor Guy : Kasilingam was the director of *Abhimanyu*.

Ramanathan : *Abhimanyu*. And he had to go to his native place for some...

Randor Guy : What exactly was this Maya Bazar sequence in the film? Can you elaborate on that?

Ramanathan : Well, you see in mythology, that, all those sequences where the *angavastram*.

Randor Guy : The shawl.

Ramanathan : The shawl disappears and turns into a snake...

Randor Guy : Who did this trick camera work?

Ramanathan : We had three cameramen actually working on that.

Randor Guy : I see. Who were they? Do you remember?

Ramanathan : W. R. Subbarao...

Randor Guy : Who specialized in tricks.

Ramanathan : Yes, in tricks. Then we had Mr. Mastan.

Randor Guy : Mastan was already there?

Ramanathan : Was there. Another, Mr Ramasamy.

Randor Guy : Who was this Ramasamy? Heard of his name in Jupiter.

Ramanathan : Yes. He was an assistant cameraman at that time when I joined the studio, under Muthuswamy, who was later in AVM.

Randor Guy : AVM?

Ramanathan : So, when Muthu left for AVM, Ramasamy was given the job.

Randor Guy : What happened to this Ramasamy? He was not heard of afterwards.

Ramanathan : I don't know. I haven't heard of him. I think the last I heard of him was when he was in here in Madras. He did some work here and after that I have not seen him.

Randor Guy : I see. So, in this *Abhimanyu* you did some sequences.

Ramanathan : Only Maya Bazar.

Randor Guy : Only Maya Bazar sequences. And were also involved in the trick works?

Ramanathan : Yes. I was. At that time Mr Karunanidhi was there. He had actually come there with...

Randor Guy : Samy?

Ramanathan : No Mr. C N Annadurai.

Randor Guy : C N Annadurai came for what purpose?

Ramanathan : He came for *Velaikkaari*.

Randor Guy : They had started *Velaikkaari* by that time?

Ramanathan : No, actually *Rajakumari* was the earlier film.

Randor Guy : Yes that's where MG Ramchandran was hero for the first time.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Directed by A S A Sami. But it was also his first film as a director

Ramanathan : Yes. And Mr Karunanidhi wrote the dialogues.

Randor Guy : For *Rajakumari*?

Ramanathan : For *Rajakumari*. And after that of course C N Annadurai came for *Velaikkaari* when he came up with the story, Mr Karunanidhi was with him.

Randor Guy : So you knew him at Jupiter?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He was working as a script man. Was he also staying on the studio premises?

Ramanathan : No, he was staying separately in a lodge somewhere. You know in those days they allowed you to stay in lodges.

Randor Guy : And you were telling me about this famous producer Chinnappa Devar being there. Can you tell me something about that?

Ramanathan : Oh, he was a very nice man.

Randor Guy : What was he at that time?

Ramanathan : Well, he was a Sandow. Just a Sandow, Gymnast when he discovered his physique was exemplary and he was very keen to join...

Randor Guy : Act?

Ramanathan : Acting.

Randor Guy : What was he doing apart from being a Sandow? I believe he was doing some milk-wending business and all that?

Ramanathan : Yes, he had something like that.

Randor Guy : Cows?

Ramanathan : Yes. But I didn't know much about his...

Randor Guy : Background

Ramanathan : Background. But he used to come there and was engaged as one of those...

Randor Guy : Junior artists?

Ramanathan : Yes. He used to come there and ask me, “Sir why don’t you give me a chance to act in this film?” I said, “Well you have to speak good dialogue properly first”. So, I asked him to speak something and he was...

Randor Guy : Not able to?

Ramanathan : Not able to... It was not very distinct. So, I said he had to get his speech therapy.

Randor Guy : Which film was this?

Ramanathan : It was actually from *My Son*.

Randor Guy : Oh I see.

Ramanathan : From *My Son* and later on in even in *Kanniyin Kaadhali*. So, then he used to come and trouble me always. He was very keen. Then I used to go to films very frequently. Our studio was in Singanallur and theatre was somewhere about 4 miles away in the town. And if you had to go to the cinema you had to go by *Jatka*, the horse carriage.

Randor Guy : Because there were no autos or taxis in those days.

Ramanathan : No. And horse carriages the charges used to be quite expensive. He used to come every evening and ask, “Sir what about going to a film? Why don’t you go to a film today?” Very frequently he used to ask. Sometimes I used to go sometimes I didn’t. One day he said, “Why don’t we go to a film? There’s some film going on”. I wanted to see this *Corsican Brothers*.

Randor Guy : Alexander Dumas’.

Ramanathan : Alexander Dumas’. And “I want to see this film. But there’s not much time. there’s only 15 min left I don’t think I can make it”. He said, “Don’t worry Sir. I can take you on my bike”

Randor Guy : On his bicycle?

Ramanathan : On his bicycle. He made me sit on the bicycle bar.

Randor Guy : On the bar?

Ramanathan : And he actually flew you know, all the way from Singanallur to the Carnatic Theatre where it was. And all the way there he just took off like a plane flight. I was afraid and scared a lot. I kept saying, “Go slow, go slow”. “I’m here Sir. Don’t worry” So finally he pushed me into the theatre and said, ‘Still there’s time Sir, just take the ticket and go’.

“Why don’t you come along?” I asked him.

“No, I don’t want to see this film. It’s all in English. I won’t be able to follow it, you carry on. After the film is over, I’ll come and pick you up.”

I said, “Why? Don’t bother. Where will you go?”

He said, “Don’t worry about me Sir, I will come and pick you up”. I thought he was just joking. After I saw the film and I came out- he was there.

Randor Guy : With his cycle?

Ramanathan : Yes. With his cycle. I said, “Why didn’t you go? I could have gone”

Randor Guy : Did you at that time anticipate that he was going to be such a big producer, making Hindi films, Tamil films?

Ramanathan : No but now when I recall I could see that he was a man of persistent perseverance.

Randor Guy : That's what got him success.

Ramanathan : Yes definitely. You know he used to come there every evening with his brother M. A. Thirumugam to the studios. Every evening at 5:30 or 6 o'clock he used to be there with his brother.

Randor Guy : Thirumugam?

Ramanathan : Thirumugam.

Randor Guy : He was not working in the studio at that time? In the editing department?

Ramanathan : No, probably he had just finished college or... And he used to come every day and wait.

Randor Guy : Wait for whom?

Ramanathan : Wait for the manager of the studio, one Santhanam Iyer. And why? Santanam Iyer felt he was coming and giving trouble every day. You see, why was he there? He wanted his brother to be placed in the studio in some job.

Randor Guy : He became editor in editing department?

Ramanathan : No but then Santhanam didn't...

Randor Guy : Bother?

Ramanathan : Bother. He said, "No it's not possible it's not possible. I'm not the owner, you can't come and trouble me like this". "Somehow or the other give him a chance". Every day he

used to come, every day he was there. And finally, fortunately for Mr. M. A. Thirumugam, one editor who was there.. I forget the name- Raju or some such name. He had some ailment and he died.

Randor Guy : He died?

Ramanathan : Yes. So, he wanted another man to edit that film. And they wanted an assistant. Then M. A. Thirumugam got a chance as an assistant.

Randor Guy : So that persistence of waiting at the gate paid.

Ramanathan : Paid. And also, he will go on trying even for acting. He'd try his best to speak. As best as he could. But of course, you know these things can't be helped. So finally, he worked very hard.

Randor Guy : He became a top producer in Hindi and Tamil.

Ramanathan : Yes. he was a very nice man. The way he took me to the cinema on his bike- that shows. Just not the selfish motive; he was more than that. He had something; a very good-natured man.

Randor Guy : Was he in touch with you in later days when he became a big producer?

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : *Haathi Mere Saathi* and all?

Ramanathan : No. Actually, I went to Singapore you know. So, when I came back from Singapore, he was a famous producer. I used to see him in the studios.

Randor Guy : Was there any contact?

Ramanathan : No. He would come and wish. That's all. And I used to ask him, "Do you remember you took me to the theatre on your bike? I can never forget it, even though so many years have passed" A nice man, very nice man.

01:29:48-01:33:48

Randor Guy : Now coming back to *Krishna Bhakti*, why did it take four years in production? Especially when Lena Chettiar was a very monied producer. They said that he could raise money. Money was not a huge problem, the way he was spending...

Ramanathan : No problem.

Randor Guy : The way you were describing it- giving houses, sending you to Bangalore to write stories...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : What was the problem in that film dragged it on for four years in production?

Ramanathan : Well, you see it was a question of trying for perfection.

Randor Guy : Was it R S Mani's aim?

Ramanathan : Yes, it was.

Randor Guy : In what way was he aiming for perfection?

Ramanathan : He was a very patient man who will not mind spending any length of time to go into minute details.

Randor Guy : Can you give me any example of that? What makes you say that?

Ramanathan : Well, I told you we saw that film *Gaslight*. We saw that so many times. Just to study that character, we had to see it over and over again.

Randor Guy : How did that kind of thing work? In *Krishna Bhakti* can you cite any? In *Krishna Bhakti*- did his penchant for perfection as you were expressing- come to light or was known to you? Because you knew him very well.

Ramanathan : Yes. You see he would spend any length of time discussing a particular scene. It was written down long before we went to the studios. You see he would spend as much time as possible into all details in the script. We were rewriting, revising, introducing something which would help in the technical advancements. Because he was an editor, a good editor. He would think of all those aspects when he worked. He worked very seriously- not minding the time spent even for small incidents. I can't tell you any incident off hand just like that because every day it used to be that way.

Randor Guy : Anything that stands out in your memory where some such thing he did? Which brings out the quality of his quest for perfection? Do you recall that?

Ramanathan : It was there all the time,

Randor Guy : All the time?

Ramanathan : All the time. There's no particular instance that I can tell you. Even the dialogues, even the structure of the story with a view to the technical aspects that I told you. He worked very hard.

Randor Guy : And these are all black and white films?

Ramanathan : Black and white films.

Randor Guy : And was there any outdoor shooting done in *Krishna Bhakti*? Any sequences?

Ramanathan : I don't recall any outdoor sequences. Over all we shot inside the studio.

Randor Guy : And this character of T R Rajakumari as the dancing girl who was lusted by the king, D Balasubramaniam played that role- and that's the time she is narrating the Harikatha...

Ramanathan : Yes...

Randor Guy : *Sengkamalam engindra daasi*...Sengkamalam or whatever her name was in the story, was that character also deliberately worked out ? Rajakumari's character whom he ultimately tries to seduce...

Ramanathan : It was all created...

Randor Guy : It was not an inspiration from any?

Ramanathan : No, it was created. Because just as he discussed the story, even the characters were discussed. He made the characters as sublime as in mythology as possible. Every character-P U Chinnappa's, Rajakumari's and S. P. L. Dhanalakshmi's character... He contributed to every character.

01:33:49-01:38:46

Randor Guy : Now coming to P U Chinnappa... At that time he was one of the top heroes of Tamil cinema.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Can you tell me something about P U Chinnappa?

Ramanathan : He was a very nice man.

Randor Guy : He was supposed to be kind of a ruffian.

Ramanathan : No!

Randor Guy : Lots of sides to his character I think.

Ramanathan : Yes of course, he was a very nice soft spoken man as far as I know. As far as I moved with him and he moved with me.

Randor Guy : You knew him very well?

Ramanathan : I knew him very well. I used to visit his house.

Randor Guy : Where was he living?

Ramanathan : In Kilpauk, I don't remember the name of the road where he was staying. And he was a very nice man. In fact, he used to come to Coimbatore also, for shooting of some other producer's film. He was a very nice man and very gentle. Very soft spoken, mild and unassuming.

Randor Guy : I see...

Ramanathan : One point when I was working in Krishna Pictures, the late T N Rajaratnam Pillai...

Randor Guy : Nadaswaram Vidwan.

Ramanathan : Yes, whom Lena Chettiar knew very well. In fact, Lena Chettiar had some kind of an authority over him. He called him and asked him to play the nadaswaram upstairs in the balcony.

Randor Guy : In the company - private entertainment?

Ramanathan : Yes, Private entertainment. And he spent all his time there. And P U Chinnappa, myself and some others were there and we enjoyed it. And then casually there was a talk and he mentioned to P U Chinnappa, “M K Thyagaraja Bhagvatar was a good singer but as far as acting is concerned, I still have my reservations”

Randor Guy : He’s supposed to be a non-actor.

Ramanathan : Then P U Chinnappa immediately said “No sir. He’s a very highly talented actor. He has achieved so much. He’s a great man. He’s a great artist.” We knew that Chinnappa was a far better actor, than Thyagaraja Bhagvatar.

Randor Guy : Bhagvatar was only a singer.

Ramanathan : But P U Chinnappa praised him, elevated him.

Randor Guy : He elevated him...

Ramanathan : So, he was of that nature. But he is a ruffian as you say, only rough to those who misbehave towards him. He has certain principles and if anybody casts aspersions against him, or he happened to listen- it came to his ears, then he becomes sort of a ...

Randor Guy : Because I’ll give you one amusing incident. It was narrated to me by M S Viswanathan the Music director. A Very good friend of mine. I believe once in Newtowne studios there was a cook in the mess... I forget his name... He remembered it.

Ramanathan : In Newtowne studios?

Randor Guy : Serving coffee and tea. He and Chinnappa used to know each other earlier. When Chinnappa was not yet a star. And he came there to work for some film. I think it was *Kannagi*...during the making of *Kannagi*.

Ramanathan : I see.

Randor Guy : Which was shot in Newtone. In which Viswanathan played a role I believe; at that time, he was wanting to be an actor also. And he told - “You see *Kannagi* anywhere next time, look out for me, you may not recognize me, I was so small and thin.” And I believe some comment about sharing of the beedi between these two, lead to a wrestling match under the banyan tree. That famous banyan tree!

Ramanathan : The famous banyan tree!

Randor Guy : And the entire studio staff including Jithan, Dinshaw, and everybody - they were all watching this wrestling match going on. And in spite of the fact that people tried to interfere and stop, Chinnappa was a top star, he would not stop until the other man was knocked out on the floor. And people were clapping away and encouraging both sides... “C’mon C’mon Chinnappa! C’mon somebody else!”. And he said it went on for almost an hour and that fellow was floored. He (Chinnappa) emerged victorious and said, “*Don’t you dare! Go away, don’t you ask me for beedi again!*”

Ramanathan : Oh, he was very versatile.

Randor Guy : He was a wrestler.

Ramanathan : I remember this *Silambam*- swinging of sticks and everything. He used to sing classical, non-classical. He was highly talented. Very versatile. And he did not particularly want to do only hero’s role or anything like that. He wanted to do some character acting.

Randor Guy : Some of the acting he did was, as the hero of the picture.

Ramanathan : Hero of the picture but it was a sort of character acting.

Randor Guy : Yeah, that’s true. Character acting. And *Krishna Bhakti* - how did it fare at the box office?

Ramanathan : It was successful at the box office of course. But Lena Chettiar had spent quite a lot on that. So, the margin of profit would have been...

Randor Guy : Very much less.

01:38:47-01:42:16

Randor Guy : And after *Krishna Bhakti* what did you do?

Ramanathan : I actually I went back to Jupiter Pictures.

Randor Guy : Why? What took you back to Jupiter?

Ramanathan : Well, Lena Chettiar found that the expense for *Krishna Bhakti* was going very high.

Randor Guy : Naturally.

Ramanathan : And he wanted to make a short film... a feature film...budget film.

Randor Guy : What they call a 'Quickie'?

Ramanathan : Yes. I was assistant director in *Krishna Bhakti* and almost 75% had been completed. Then he took me one day in his car, the famous Plymouth car to the beach and said, "Ramanathan, you see *Krishna Bhakti* is going on and on and on and I want to make another film and I would like you to direct it." I said, "Alright". I was very happy about it. So, he said, "I'm going to take the film called *Tara Sasankam*'

Randor Guy : The story of the Moon God and Brihaspati's wife Tara.

Ramanathan : Yes. And he said "Alright, I've got the book and you can read it, direct it. But don't tell this to anyone."

Randor Guy : Don't tell R S Mani (laughs).

Ramanathan : I started working on that. My work as an assistant director in *Krishna Bhakti* was going on. I was very disciplined in that respect. But apart from that I was doing this. But somehow, somebody came down there and it was T S Balaiah...

Randor Guy : The actor... Was Balaiah in *Krishan Bhakti*?

Ramanathan : No. He came there as Chettiar's friend he came there. And Chettiar told him, "Balaiah I'm going to take another short film... I mean a budget film. A Quickie- *Tara Sasankam* and Ramanathan to direct it. "This was overheard by somebody else and that went into Mr. R S Mani's ears and probably... but he didn't tell me anything. R S Mani was a good friend of mine actually. He was still a nice man. But somehow or the other it upset him or he felt that work in *Krishna Bhakti* would suffer if I concentrated more...

Randor Guy : He didn't like it?

Ramanathan : He didn't like it. So, he spoke to Chettiar, Lena Chettiar one day took me again to Marina beach and said, "I've got something to tell you. Don't mistake me, I think we have to drop *Tara Sasankam* for the time being."

Randor Guy : It must have been very disappointing to you.

S Ramanathan: Oh, it was, very much. I was thoroughly depressed.

Randor Guy : Shocked!

Ramanathan : Shocked. Then he said, "Don't tell anybody. R S Mani feels you should not do it because your work in *Krishna Bhakti* would suffer. Anyway, you can come to work tomorrow and continue. I told him "Sorry Chettiar. I'm very grateful to you for all that you've done but I'm sorry I won't be coming to work tomorrow."

Randor Guy : You got pricked.

Ramanathan : Yes. So, an opportunity missed, for one thing.

Randor Guy : I know.

Ramanathan : And my sincerity to people had been ignored. I felt I was...

Randor Guy : Let down badly?

Ramanathan : Let down very badly. So, I didn't go after that. Then Chettiar said, "No, you have to come." Again, he came and asked me to come. He said "I could have told you something else but I told you the truth. And I took it very seriously and left.

01:42:17-01:46:37

Randor Guy : After that what happened?

Ramanathan : Then I went back to Jupiter Pictures.

Randor Guy : Again?

Ramanathan : Yes. Because it was like my second home.

Randor Guy : In Coimbatore at that time?

Ramanathan : Yes. I was already married; I had my wife and I went there. And I wanted to work in their films. Because they were taking a number of films and I knew Somu would give me an opportunity. And in fact, I went with a script.

Randor Guy : What script was that?

Ramanathan : It was a Zamindar story.

Randor Guy : Your own?

Ramanathan : My own story. And I wanted D Balasubramanian and others to act in that and I even made a cast list. I went and gave it to them. And actually, before I took it to them, I wrote it in English. Hand-written. I showed it to Mr. Ellis R. Dungan.

Randor Guy : What was he doing at that time in Madras?

Ramanathan : He was directing *Meera* with M S Subbulakshmi. I showed it to him, he didn't even read the script. First, he said, "You should create an impression as soon as one looks at the script, or whatever you have there. It should be so impressive that it should attract them, not the content."

Randor Guy : Presentation.

Ramanathan : Presentation is very important.

Randor Guy : The form!

Ramanathan : Yes, form. "You should type it on bond paper, bind it and have a cover."

Randor Guy : Well packaged?

Ramanathan : Well packaged. I said, "Well I don't think they do so here. Maybe they do it in Hollywood!"

"No, that's the way to do it. If you look at all my scripts..." And he showed me all his scripts. All were bound and of course him being an American it was natural for him to do so. Then I did it all again, I typed them up and took it to Coimbatore and showed it to Somasundaram. Because he then asked me to wait for some time and then finally told," I don't think it will

work. I'm sorry you had to wait. We'll give you an opportunity to work because we're getting K Ramnath from here and he'll be directing a film here."

Randor Guy : I see. That was *Kanniyin Kaadhali*?

Ramanathan : *Kanniyin Kaadhali*.

Randor Guy : Based on *Twelfth Night*.

Ramanathan : Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. And "If he agrees, you can work under him as assistant director."

Randor Guy : I see!

Ramanathan : Nothing would have given me greater pleasure and pride than working under Ramnath. He was a great genius and I said, "Oh that's brilliant!"

Randor Guy : Did you know Ramnath earlier?

Ramanathan : No, I didn't know. I had seen him in Gemini studios. When he was doing *Kannamma En Kaadhali*.

Randor Guy : What made you go to Gemini Studios?

Ramanathan : Make me? Ellis R. Dungan.

Randor Guy : What was he doing there?

Ramanathan : He wanted certain prints from the studio. Which he had asked them to keep in their library.

Randor Guy : What prints were they?

Ramanathan : Some old prints of some of his old films. He was doing a lot of work you know apart from these films- he had gone to Delhi to cover Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi and all those people...

Randor Guy : Indira Gandhi was nowhere in the picture.

Ramanathan : Nowhere in the picture but she was also there, as his daughter. He used to take all those films and on certain occasions he used to go and film.

Randor Guy : Newsreel coverage?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He was doing these apart from films?

Ramanathan : Yes. Oh, quite a lot. Jungle films.

Randor Guy : He was interested in wildlife?

Ramanathan : Yes. He did quite a lot. And some of those films he kept there and he asked me to collect those films. So, I went there and I saw...

Randor Guy : During the war, didn't he join the army?

Ramanathan : No. Because he was here in India. He was in India from 1935 or so. He was an American citizen all the time.

Randor Guy : Then I hear he was staying that expensive hotel in Indian Overseas Bank Compound.

Ramanathan : Yes. And later on, he shifted to a place in Kilpauk after he got married.

Randor Guy : Where did he stay in Kilpauk do you remember?

Ramanathan : It was somewhere in near Newtowne studios. I can't recollect the name of the street.

Randor Guy : Arms Road? Halls Road? Kilpauk Garden Road?

Ramanathan : I think it was Kilpauk Garden Road. Earlier, a line of houses... he was staying there with his wife.

Randor Guy : He was married at that time?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : I see. Did you know his wife?

Ramanathan : Yes. I have met her and have talked to her.

Randor Guy : American?

Ramanathan : Yes, American. She came from America and they stayed there. That was at a later stage. I think towards the end of *Meera* that he got married.

01:46:38-01:52:17

Randor Guy : We were talking about the coming of Ramnath.

Ramanathan : Ah yes. And I said, "Alright." "If K Ramnath agreed to have you as his assistant, go ahead, the audience will engage you." I didn't know K Ramnath well enough. Mr. Mastan was the cameraman, he was a very good friend of mine...

Randor Guy : He was already there in Jupiter?

Ramanathan : Yes, he was working there. Great cameraman. So, I told Mr Mastan, “Look here Mr. Ramnath seems to be coming here to direct a film, I would like to be his assistant. Do you know him? Why don’t you introduce me to him and see if I get a chance?”

Randor Guy : What happened after that?

Ramanathan : Mr. Mastan took me over to him. We walked all the way to his house.

Randor Guy : Where was Mr. Ramnath? Where was he staying?

Ramanathan : He was in R S Puram or some such area.

Randor Guy : He had already come to Coimbatore at that time and taken up a house?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Was he married at that time?

Ramanathan : Yes, he was married. And I believe he had a daughter also. And it was quite a distance and we walked all the way.

Randor Guy : I see. (laughs)

Ramanathan : He said, “We’ll talk on the way, this is one way of conversing”. So, we walked all the way. Mr Ramnath was there in his house and Mastan introduced me to him. He said, "He’s a very good assistant director. He’s worked in such and such films. And he is very keen on working under you as an assistant director.”

Randor Guy : What was Ramnath’s reaction?

Ramanathan : Well, he is a very quiet and reserved man. It's very difficult to judge him by his expression or anything like that. He never gives in easily, expression- wise. He said, "Why do I need an assistant director? The sound engineer records the sound well, he's my assistant; the cameraman shoots the film well, he's my assistant; the makeup man does his makeup on the artist well, he's my assistant; the costumer gives him proper costume, he's my assistant; there's a production manager who looks after the production, he's my assistant. All these are my assistants. Why would I want an Assistant Director?"

Randor Guy : He stressed on the word 'director'?

Ramanathan : (laughs) He stressed on the word 'director'. I was a bit depressed. I said, "Sir, I very much want to be your assistant. And this is one of my great dreams which should come true, which must come true." He said "Alright I'll let you know". Next day itself he spoke to Somu, the producer- proprietor of Jupiter Pictures and they called me and said, "Alright, Ramnath says you can be his assistant director" and they engaged me. That was really one of the best moments of my life as far as film career is concerned.

Randor Guy : Working for Ramnath.

Ramanathan : Working for K Ramnath. Because you see, I learnt so much from him, which I couldn't have learnt otherwise. He was a very good cameraman, editor, scriptwriter. He was everything.

Randor Guy : One man filmmaker!

Ramanathan : Yes, and you know he even used to write the lyrics!

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : Yes. Not the lyrics for the film but he would guide Kannadasan what's to be written. You know in *Kanniyin Kaadhali* you will recall there is a lyric which begins like

'*vandhaen ayya, kaettaen ayya, thandhaen ayya*'. He said, "Talk to the people in their own language, they don't come to cinema to study literature. They don't want any of your..."

Randor Guy : High flown poetry?

Ramanathan : High flown poetry. Talk to them. Speak to them. So, he started writing, lyrics, somewhat like this. And then Kannadasan picked it up.

Randor Guy : Was it Kannadasan's first attempt at writing film lyrics?

Ramanathan : I think it was.

Randor Guy : That's what I heard from Gopi, Gopalakrishnan.

Ramanathan : Yes, it was. it was. And he started changing his way of writing lyrics also. His attitude towards cinema writing was well implanted there.

Randor Guy : Because Gopalakrishnan told me- I've done a similar program with him-that he took Kannadasan to Ramnath and introduced him and Ramnath asked him to write a song and Kannadasan also spoke about it on a different occasion. And the first song he wrote for films for *Kanniyin Kaadhali* by Ramnath also conveyed some meaning to Kannadasan as a kind of lesson in his own life. *Kalangaadhiru maname, un kavalai ellaam theerum oru dhiname*, meaning, 'don't bother, all your dreams will come true one day'. He said all those dreams came true.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And it was kind of dramatic irony, whatever you call it, that he wrote such line. Kannadasan told me so once about writing this for Ramnath. Of course, everybody speaks very highly about Ramnath- whatever they talk about him. I knew Ramnath when I was a student of law. When he came to Gopalratnam's office- my senior's office, when he had some trouble with one of the productions called *Vidudalai*. It was a new era. That was in the 50s. very soon after that he died. That time of course I had no dream that I was going to be in films. So, I never

bothered to ask anything about it. Except what he used to tell us about films which were aside observations.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : I missed getting it all from the horse's mouth but it was not in my mind, nowhere in the horizon.

01:52:18-01:58:05

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : So, this meeting with Ramnath- this *Kanniyin Kaadhali*... How did it all start?

Ramanathan : Well actually it was adapted from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. He had already planned it.

Randor Guy : Before he came to Coimbatore?

Ramanathan : He had already been engaged by Jupiter Pictures. They had already planned to do this film. He came down with the story.

Randor Guy : So, he had the script written?

Ramanathan : He had in his own way his treatment. Then they engaged this S D Sundaram, who was writing *Kaviyin Kanavu*, the play.

Randor Guy : Probably that was his first attempt at screen writing.

Ramanathan : At screenwriting. Exactly. And he called him and discussed the dialogues and he made him write the dialogues. And even in the writing of the dialogues, Ramnath used to guide S D Sundaram who had already written so many plays.

Randor Guy : But why I'm asking you- again this *Kanniyin Kaadhali*, I saw as a schoolboy. I think I saw it at Paragon or someplace in Madras.

Ramanathan : Maybe, I don't know.

Randor Guy : I'm not very sure. I think it was Paragon. And the Tamil of S D Sundaram was all in very highly literary fashion.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : With a lot of alliterative sentences. Maybe it was the influence of Anna Durai or whatever.

Ramanathan : Yes of course.

Randor Guy : And the discussion of Madhuridevi's eyes...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : A woman parading as a man. That portion of *Twelfth Night* I remember.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Madhuri Devi and Anjali Devi. "*Un kangal kadaiyani illadha vandi chakram*" is made up of similes and metaphors.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : I remember this original line. I think that was deliberately done at Ramnath's insistence. That kind of Tamil?

Ramanathan : That kind was ... He liked it in a way. He liked it. He says this is Shakespeare's work.

Randor Guy : So, he wanted the spirit of Shakespeare.

Ramanathan : It should be something poetic.

Randor Guy : That taste and essence of Shakespeare.

Ramanathan : Yes, he wanted something on these lines. As Shakespeare had done so much for English literature, let us do something for this Tamil film literature.

Randor Guy : So that was his idea?

Ramanathan : Yes. And he allowed it. There was also another line where I remember... Where this S. A. Natarajan was acting as the villain there. And he's very much keen on getting the princess or whoever she was, which role was done by....

Randor Guy : Anjali Devi.

Ramanathan : Yes. And he sarcastically speaks to her, "*Maegalaiya vandhu irukkiradhu? Karpukku arasi kannagiya vandhu irukkiradhu? Kaana kidaikkadha kalai pokkishama vandhu irukkiradhu?*" (Who has come- Maegalai or the chaste Kannagi or the unattainable treasure trove? Who is here?) So, all those wordings ... Natarajan had his own way of talking... His own style of delivery of dialogues. Both combined- that's some unusual form. And Ramnath was very accommodative in that respect.

Randor Guy : Did he can the film himself?

Ramanathan : No. It was done with W R Subba Rao.

Randor Guy : Oh, Subba Rao canned *Kanniyin Kaadhali*.

Ramanathan : He was already quite a well-known cameraman.

Randor Guy : Shekhar doing the artwork...

Ramanathan : Artwork was done by Shekhar.

Randor Guy : Art direction. They had really elaborate sets for palaces.

Ramanathan : But they were always together. Ramnath-Shekhar was a team. He did all their settings. He was a very good artist.

Randor Guy : Art Director.

Ramanathan : Art Director. And even camera, W R Subba Rao had already been a good cameraman earlier. From Modern Theatres and so on. But when he started working for K Ramnath, he was you know, a little bit unsure of himself.

Randor Guy : He was nervous.

Ramanathan : Although K Ramnath was only a director, he was thinking of K Ramnath as a cameraman. Every time he lit up the set and positioned his camera, of course under the guidance of Ramnath, he actually, as soon as he was ready- he would ask Mr. Ramnath, "Sir you please come and have a view through the camera".

Randor Guy : Make sure?

Ramanathan : "Make sure it is alright". He wouldn't move from his director's chair and he would say, "You're the cameraman. Whatever you do is what we are going to see on the screen, you have confidence in yourself, don't worry about us. You see you just change a few lights here and there, this way and that way. That's all" And Subba Rao would place his camera always on the trolley.

Randor Guy : I see. He was fond of movement.

Ramanathan : He was always fond of movement Even if there was a static shot, he would place it on the trolley first and then only take the trolley for steady shot.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : He was very particular about trying to make the camera move and pan, do a lot of panning and all that you see. So Ramnath used to give him freedom to place the camera in certain... He'd give the idea that's all. And Subba Rao as the operating cameraman, the cinematographer he used to do all this.

Randor Guy : He used to operate himself... Subba Rao himself?

Ramanathan : He used to.

Randor Guy : Or did he have an operating assistant?

Ramanathan : No, he used to do it. They had assistants for other purposes. Not for operating camera. Cinematography he himself would do it.

Randor Guy : Did he have a Mitchell at that time or Arriflex?

Ramanathan : No only Mitchell. And a new one also was there, I think. For every shot he was moving the camera. So Ramnath himself probably got uncomfortable. He said, "Subba Rao! It's all right to place the camera on a trolley. It doesn't matter. But for every shot if you start pushing the camera as a trolley shot for everything, then when you really want to take a trolley shot what happens?" He said, "No then you have to push it faster. So steady shot will be steady shot, slow trolley will be slow trolley shot and a fast trolley- when some climax sequence or something happens, if required for the camera to move- then we move it." He said, "Alright".

01:58:06-02:05:33

Randor Guy : I see. And Anjali Devi was suited for- first experience at Jupiter?

Ramanathan : Yes, it was. She had come first.

Randor Guy : Can you tell us something about Anjali Devi as an artist? Very famous in Telugu. And at one time she was a superstar in Tamil as well as in Telugu.

Ramanathan : Yes. She was a very good actress.

Randor Guy : She spoke her own dialogues? Because her Telugu or Tamil was not very clear, not very good.

Ramanathan : No, she spoke Tamil.

Randor Guy : It was not dubbed?

Ramanathan : No not dubbed.

Randor Guy : I see. Was there any dubbing of dialogue at that time by artists? Like they do today?

Ramanathan : No, you see in *Kanniyin Kaadhali*... Madhuri Devi acts as the brother and sister in the play. She was enacting the role of the brother and the sister, with her own voice. It was recorded, filmed with all the marking and everything was done. The whole picture was completed. Then for the male character, for the brother, Ramnath had to naturally put in a male voice.

Randor Guy : Male voice.

Ramanathan : He knew V Gopalakrishnan. Gopi.



ntai

Randor Guy : Gopi?

Ramanathan : And I think he was doing his MA at the time. If I'm not mistaken.

Randor Guy : Yes, he told me that.

Ramanathan : Yes, and he was brought down. Very lively, very brisk. Very (Inaudible) If you see him right now, he is livelier, much livelier than he was then. And they said, "You have to give the voice to Madhuri Devi and you can see the film". And the film was projected, he saw the film and then finally arrangements were made to do the dubbing of the voice. For which the film was not projected.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : Yes. Because he had no background projection in Coimbatore, in the studios. You see we didn't have any dubbing facilities at Coimbatore at that time.

Randor Guy : At Central studios, Jupiter.

Ramanathan : At Jupiter. So, this voice had to be dubbed and Gopi saw the film.

Randor Guy : He was made to see the film. He was shown in projection theatre?

Ramanathan : We had a projection theatre.

Randor Guy : Attached to the studio?

Ramanathan : Yes. And he was shown the film. He saw the film and they were all ready for dubbing. I had all the dialogues with me inside a small recording studio... And Gopi said, "Where is the film? Where is the screen?" Ramnath said, "No you don't have to see the film." "Then how will I dub the voice of Madhuri? Don't I have to see the lip movement and so on?"

“No, you don’t have to”. He said, “What is this? How is it possible?” We had loops ready with certain passages. Then in installments, bit-by-bit it has to go in a loop. If there was a certain length of dialogue, equally long would be a gap... a silent film running.

Randor Guy : I see

Ramanathan : It would be running all the time in a loop. Going on in cycles. And Gopi will have an earphone. Listening to Madhuri Devi’s dialogue. So Ramnath told him, “You listen to the dialogue, keep up the timing, but act. You have to do with your voice and act.” Actually, he wanted Gopi to act better than Madhuri Devi. We did his voice. He would listen, and then when the gap came, he would speak.

Randor Guy : Oh, I see.

Ramanathan : So that gap would be filled up over with his voice... And if he overlaps, it would go into Madhuri’s voice. So, he had to be very careful. It should come as soon as Madhuri Devi finishes her last word, Gopi has to begin and finish his dialogue before Madhuri begins the repetition.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : It went on like that.

Randor Guy : So, he had to act, emote with his voice, without the picture?

Ramanathan : And follow proper duration with proper rhythm and all that.

Randor Guy : It is an excellent idea!

Ramanathan : Yes. Ramnath’s own idea.

Randor Guy : I know.

Ramanathan : I don't think anybody would have done it. I was wondering how it was possible, what was going to happen.

Randor Guy : What about the sync?

Ramanathan : How was it going to synchronize? This was done for the whole picture.

Randor Guy : I see. Wherever Madhuri had to speak in male voice.

Ramanathan : Yes. It was all done that way and finally we went into the editing room and as soon as the print came out, Ramnath put the film on the Moviola with Madhuri's picture and Gopi's voice. He marked according to the frame that was required to start and end. And the synchronization was so perfect!

Randor Guy : Speaks highly of Gopi's talents also to hear it and speak.

Ramanathan : Yes certainly.

Randor Guy : Simultaneously...

Ramanathan : Simultaneously, and there was no retake. Wonderful. You can go for any length of time to record the voice and fit it last, it takes it!

Randor Guy : I don't think everybody can do that.

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : Maybe Gopi could manage it because he was such a talented...

Ramanathan : Yes. He's very highly talented. I was fascinated by his talent at that time. Being a college student doing all this, it was all very remarkable. Very definitely highly talented.

Randor Guy : Yes, he was the hero in my TV serial.

Ramanathan : Yes, I've seen him.

Randor Guy : So, Gopi did that portion? And his synchronization was perfect.

Ramanathan : So perfect!

Randor Guy : Who was the official editor of that film? Ramnath probably sat there and edited it because he also loved to edit his films.

Ramanathan : Yes, he used to be there all the time.

Randor Guy : Who was the editor at Jupiter Pictures?

Ramanathan : Surya.

Randor Guy : Surya was there? Before he came to AVM? And Thirumugam was probably an assistant at this time?

Ramanathan : No, he came in later.

Randor Guy : Later?

Ramanathan : He came in later. I mean as an editor he came in later.

Randor Guy : Assistant.

Ramanathan : Assistant, yes. He was there.

Randor Guy : He was already there.

Ramanathan : He was there. He came at just the beginning.

Randor Guy : For *Kanniyin Kaadhali*. Who was the lab in charge at the time?

Ramanathan : There was one Sundararajan.

Randor Guy : Sundararajan.

Ramanathan : Sundararajan. He was a man from Coimbatore. He was there all the time. You know (inaudible).

Randor Guy : B R Naidu. Ramakrishnan Chettiar.

Ramanathan : Ramakrishnan Chettiar, B R Naidu. (Inaudible)

Randor Guy : Sriramulu Naidu's father. (Inaudible) where they made *Thukkaram*.1936-37. And B N Rao coming down...B N Rao told me that story.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Years ago, when I was doing the book on *Vasan*, that was the time he spoke.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And recently when I went to Coimbatore on some other work, coming from Ooty after shooting a TV film. I wanted to visit the two studios. I went to the Central Studios which is now a textile mill and then I also went to this Premier which became Pakshiraja which is now dead.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Because in those days, it became a garage and a mechanical workshop and even that closed and a sepulchral silence prevailed there. It made me very sad. I stood in the Central Studios compound for about 5 minutes looking around, trying to imagine how things were 20-30 years ago. The mill was going on at that time.

Ramanathan : Ah yes.

02:05:35-02:24:28

Randor Guy : Very sad. And this *Kanniyin Kaadhali*, how long did it take?

Ramanathan : 6 months. In those days as I told you *Krishna Bhakti* took 4-5 years. This was done in 6 months.

Randor Guy : Very fast film!

Ramanathan : Very fast and well planned. He did his planning, execution... everything was wonderful. It was really remarkable.

Randor Guy : How was Ramnath in the handling of the artists? Actors and actresses?

Ramanathan : Well, you know, he would explain the scene to them, that's all. He'd leave it to the artists to add or improve. Dialogues had to be spoken but he would leave it to them.

Randor Guy : He would not force his style on them?

Ramanathan : No not his style.

Randor Guy : Like some directors do.

Ramanathan : No. He had no style of his own. He didn't do that at all. Actually, to give you an example. K Sarangapani...

Randor Guy : The comedian.

Ramanathan : The comedian- he was acting in that film.

Randor Guy : In *Kanniyin Kaadhali*?

Ramanathan : As one of the ministers under a role that S. A. Natarajan did. So, I also acted in that film.

Randor Guy : For what role?

Ramanathan : I did the minister under Natarajan.

Randor Guy : I didn't know you at that time, I couldn't make you out. (laughs). Pulimoottai Ramasami was also there.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : As that gardener. With a belt around him and if you touch it some sound used to come. (Makes sound) That was his way of being woken by some intruder.

Ramanathan : Yes. K. Sarangapani and we were shooting in the night. And he also had this feeling that he was working under a great man like K Ramnath. He had earlier worked in so many films.

Randor Guy : Yes.

Ramanathan : But working under such a great man probably made him a bit nervous and he was flubbing his lines. Such a great stage artist and he was flubbing his lines. I was the assistant director so I said "Carry on, Sir". But take after take, it went on like that. Finally, he felt very guilty and said, "Sir you please tell the director. I need a little time. I don't know why I'm so

nervous.” I said, “You tell him yourself. He will welcome whatever you say.” He said, “Sir I feel a bit nervous. If you can just tell me how I could improve on what I’m doing, or if you could show me how I should do it, then probably I might follow your style and do something.” Mr. Ramnath said, “Sarangapani you’re an actor. I am the director of this film. You can’t do my job and I can’t do your job. And so, you as an actor do whatever you feel like. You’ve got full freedom, you see? Don’t feel nervous. There’s nothing to be nervous about. You take your own time.”

“Sir we’ve already done so many takes. 7 to 10 takes were done. I feel very guilty.”

“Don’t feel guilty about it. We’ll take 30 takes. How does it matter? It is my pleasure. Let it be 30 takes. Don’t worry”.

Randor Guy : This gave Sarangapani the confidence?

Ramanathan : Straight away he went and the take was okay.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : That was his way of handling the artist.

Randor Guy : Now talking about Anjali Devi you said something about her. What about Madhuri Devi? Did you know her well?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Was she a monthly paid artist or...?

Ramanathan : No, they were all on contracts for the duration of the film.

Randor Guy : What kind of an artist was she?

Ramanathan : She was fairly good as an actress but she couldn’t be called as a great actress.

Randor Guy : Great actress. I know.

Ramanathan : She was not. And so, in fact that role could have been done better by somebody else probably.

Randor Guy : So, what made them choose Madhuri Devi? Because she was available?

Ramanathan : She was available as an actress and Jupiter Pictures had booked her as an actress. So, she had to be engaged. And this was the only opportunity by which she could be engaged.

Randor Guy : Because, I knew her when I was an apprentice in Gopalratnam's office, a law apprentice. She was one of their clients. There used to be a kind of an impression that she was a very troublesome woman. Is that right?

Ramanathan : Yes. She used to have certain moods and certain objections and things like that. Not with K Ramnath, no. Never.

Randor Guy : I'll give you an instance which is quite humorous. There is a film called *Nalla Thangal* sometime in the late 50s in which she acted. There was a sequence in which she is made to sit on a donkey or an ass and taken in a procession like some kind of a punishment. They used to do it in the olden days. *Kazhudhai maela savari* (Donkey ride). It is supposed to be slightly shameful, especially when done to a woman. She refused to do this sequence in that film saying that an actress of her stature and status and standing should not ride an ass or a donkey. The producer, the man who financed this project was a rich lawyer. He came to Mr. Gopalratnam because he knew she was his client and said, "Sir this is happening. The film actually got stuck because this scene could not be shot. Can you advise us?" He said, "After all you've booked her for the sequence in this film. It is not Madhuri Devi who is being taken on an ass or a donkey. It is that particular character she's playing. She cannot have an objection. No serious artist could have it." "It is all very well sir, sitting here in your easy chair you're talking as a lawyer but I'm suffering because my picture is held up." Then he phoned her, then she came along with her husband Mukherjee. He was a cameraman. We were good friends at that

time. And then when she saw this lawyer seated there and she knew for what purpose she was called and, she turned red in her face and was a little angry. Then, “*Idhukkagavaa sir koopteenga yenne? (You called me here for this?)*” she started shouting. Or slightly in an angry voice because nobody shouts at Gopalratnam, he shouts everybody out. He had that booming voice. I don’t know if you know him. So, he said, “I want to ask you a question.” Then she said, “Sir how can he take such a scene? How can he ask me, Madhuri Devi, a big artist (She was also a producer at that time) to sit on an ass or whatever it is?” He said, “My dear Madhuri Devi, if anybody should have an objection it is that ass, not you.” That is very typical of Gopalratnam. (laughs)

Ramanathan : (Laughs).

Randor Guy : “*Andha kazhudhanna object pannanum? Nee yaen object panrae? (The donkey should be the one to object, why are you objecting?)*” You know she felt so deflated and everybody laughed at this, including that poor financier and with that remark she turned around and told that man, “*Yeppo sir shooting, na varen Sir*” (When is the shooting sir? I’ll come and finish it). Immediately she said she would come. This I can never forget, the sequence with Madhuri Devi.

Ramanathan : Gopalratnam had a technique of ...

Randor Guy : Technique of handling an angry woman and a client. Because he used to tell me, “This woman is always creating problems like this for producers and directors.” And this was the time, there is a link between these. This was almost the time when Ramnath was also coming there in connection with his *Viduthalai* problem. The new era films and all that. And Gopalratnam told this story to Ramnath. Ramnath used to sit like this with his arms crossed, characteristic pose.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : I remember it very well. And he burst out laughing, “Only you can take the liberty of telling that woman. Difficult woman indeed” he said. That’s why I asked you whether she was a troublesome person.

Ramanathan : No, during the shooting of *Kanniyin Kaadhali*. I don't remember any such...

Randor Guy : Because I think she was in awe of Ramnath. Probably that kept her... But she did *Mohini*.

Ramanathan : Yes. It was Lanka Satyam who directed it earlier and the later shooting was done by Ramnath.

Randor Guy : For *Mohini*?

Ramanathan : For *Mohini*. He was a very nice man.

Randor Guy : Under his name only it appeared.

Ramanathan : And finally, they were not quite satisfied with his work. Then when Ramnath came in, before doing *Kanniyin Kaadhali*, they asked him to...

Randor Guy : A S A Sami told me that the scenes of the flying horse and all that, you know he comes with a magic horse and all that was done by Ramnath.

Ramanathan : Yes. He did all that. And he didn't want to do it unless Lanka Satyam agreed.

Randor Guy : Agreed. Yes naturally.

Ramanathan : Although Lanka Satyam was a junior director as far as his experience was concerned. And he said, "No let Lanka Satyam say first that I can do it. You get his permission first." And they got his permission. He was paid and all that and he said, "All right. By all means."

Randor Guy : *Mohini* was partly done by Ramnath himself?

Ramanathan : Yes. And all the improvements. A lot of improvements were made.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : Even on Lanka Satyam's work. You see he would take shots in such a way that I was amazed. I was taken up by his talent. You see he would ask M G Ramachandran who was acting in that film...

Randor Guy : Played opposite V.N. Janaki.

Ramanathan : Yes. And he would place the camera in one position, ask him to come, stand there and give an expression and go. Then again, he would ask him to come, there would be an apple or some fruit on the table. He would say, "Take the sword and cut it. Slash it." He would do that. And then he'd ask Ramachandran to do many such of things. And that was all and then he would take something else. We didn't know for what purpose they were being taken? But finally, when we edited, the other portions and these shots- the slashings and expressions would all come together. Cuts and cuts and cuts. They were thrilling reactions. That was Ramnath's technique.

Randor Guy : I see

Ramanathan : Even in *Vauhini* he used to do all that. A highly talented man. So, as I said, I learnt a lot from him in that one film. Whatever future I had even with Shaw Brothers or elsewhere, I used to remember him, his techniques.

Randor Guy : What exactly do you mean when you say you learn a lot from him? Can you elaborate a little more?

Ramanathan : Right from the time he sits on the story, discussing the story, he gives his view and nobody can give something else or a reaction better than that.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : He would work on it silently. Very quietly, very unassumingly he would do things. And as I said the writing of lyrics, dialogues, he would write it in his own way and ask the person to improve on it or give it a touch of colour. As for camera- he would just express his views. He would say - it should move this way and this is what the artist does and this is what the camera sees and so on. He'll give such a lead which would inspire the technician or the person concerned to satisfy him in such a way. We were shooting even in this Marina for that film, we came down to Madras.

Randor Guy : For *Kanniyin Kaadhali*? You came to Madras to shoot in Marina beach?

Ramanathan : Yes

Randor Guy : I see. What were the sequences?

Ramanathan : Fishermen sequences. The fishermen were added into the story. And some of the fishermen used to come and Madhuri as the sister, she swoons and falls on the beach and so on. All those sequences were taken here. And even there, he was calm and collected. So, it was all, so pre planned in his head, that there was no need even for a script. I used to have the script in my hand, but he went on. He could remember that whatever I had in the script- he could remember.

Randor Guy : So, he never referred to the script?

Ramanathan : No. I used to refer. I never found any room to tell him, "Sir, you've made a mistake. This should happen this way or that way" It was so perfect. Probably having been a cameraman and an editor, I mean having had all that knowledge- he was so thorough!

Randor Guy : And how much do you think this *Kanniyin Kaadhali* would have cost? Do you have any rough idea on the cost of production?

Ramanathan : It was a very economical production that much I know. Compared to all the

other films that they made, except maybe *My Son*. *My Son* was also an economical film.

Randor Guy : Was the cost of the picture negative at that time?

Ramanathan : I don't recall. I can't give you an idea.

Randor Guy : And what was the salary for artists in those days?

Ramanathan : Well, it used to come from hundreds to thousands.

Randor Guy : Hundreds? Of course, the purchase power of money was quite high.

Ramanathan : It was quite all right.

Randor Guy : What was Anjali Devi paid for *Kanniyin Kaadhali*? She was quite a top actress at that time.

Ramanathan : Yes. Should have been a few thousands.

Randor Guy : Only a few thousands?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And what about the director? For instance, Ramnath himself? Did he get a monthly salary?

Ramanathan : He was paid on contract. Also a few thousands.

Randor Guy : And what about Shekhar's role? Was he on the sets?

Ramanathan : Yes, he used to be there. In case he was required to do some improvements, some touch-ups and all, he used to be there.

Randor Guy : That's all. He did not do anything...

Ramanathan : But he would everything so perfectly well that there was no reason for him to be there. He used to come and visit the sets.

Randor Guy : Only visiting. Not working?

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : Because why I'm asking is, U. Rajagopal, a cameraman who you know works for me also...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : He told me in some films, after Ramnath left B N Reddy, and B N Reddy made it much later, *Malleswari*. *Shekhar* was the art director for *Malleswari*. Supposed to be the best film for B N Reddy. Konda Reddy, his brother, was cranking it. And he said, "Shekhar used to be on the set and even the camera placement would be suggested by Shekhar so that the beauty of the set, with Vijayanagar palace and all that could be brought out". It was supposed to be a very artistic film- *Malleswari*. So, he used to work almost like another director on the set. Only thing he never used to bother about the dialogue or the expression and things like that which was left to B N Reddy. But actually, B N used to ask him about this camera placement. Konda Reddy used to shift it to see his particular viewpoint to give a third dimensional effect and all that. Naturally with Ramnath probably there was no need to suggest all this. But he was not coming regularly to set?

Ramanathan : But he used to come. They were almost like brothers. And they would have their discussion earlier and Ramnath having been a cameraman; already he knew where to place the camera. But artistically any suggestions or anything that Shekhar could or would give would be accepted by Ramnath.

Randor Guy : Who was the music director for *Kanniyin Kaadhali*?

Ramanathan : What's his name? C. S. Subbaraman.

Randor Guy : C. R. Subbaraman!

Ramanathan : C. R. Subbaraman.

Randor Guy : C. R. Subbaraman was the music director. Was M S Viswanathan there? Was he his assistant at that time?

Ramanathan : He was just there.

Randor Guy : Not yet composing... And T K Ramurthy was not there?

Ramanathan : He used to come with the orchestra. In the Orchestra he used to play...

Randor Guy : Play the violin.

Ramanathan : He used to play the violin and T R Pappa...

Randor Guy : And all those people were there.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And the recording was done in Jupiter itself?

Ramanathan : In studios.

Randor Guy : In Central Studios in Coimbatore?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : So, you never came to Madras for anything like that?

Ramanathan : No.

Randor Guy : What about re-recording?

Ramanathan : Re-recording was done there itself.

Randor Guy : In Coimbatore?

Ramanathan : In Coimbatore. Nothing was done in Madras.

Randor Guy : Why I'm asking you is, A S A Sami told me that during one particular period, Jupiter had a recording department in Mangala Vilas in Mylapore. You know there is this famous bungalow, which used to belong to G A Natesan. The Liberal Party and all that.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Modern Review or Indian Review whatever he was running. That G A Natesan's bungalow, Mangala Vilas, was taken on lease by Jupiter. They wanted to convert it into a studio. They could not. And because they had taken it on lease, all the recordings of songs, re-recordings, anything concerning audio used to be done there. That was what A S A Sami told me. And he also told me this story which could be more of a myth. This Mangala Vilas had a reputation of being a house which brought bad luck. It is supposed to have brought bad luck to G A Natesan himself. So that's the reason he gave it on lease and he said that Jupiter Picture's sudden fall, from being one of the biggest companies in South India, to almost a non-entity, was attributed to their brief sojourn at Mangala Vilas. That's what he told me, this particular story.

Ramanathan : No, I was away at Singapore at that time.

Randor Guy : You did not know about this Mangala Vilas?...

Ramanathan : After they came away from Coimbatore, after the lease was over...

Randor Guy : No he said that while they were in Coimbatore, in Mangala Vilas...

Ramanathan : No that's not true. No recording was done in Madras as long as they were there in Coimbatore.

Randor Guy : You don't remember this Mangala Vilas business?

Ramanathan : Mangala Vilas I had been there when I came from Singapore in '52.

Randor Guy : Not when you were shooting in Jupiter earlier?

Ramanathan : No such thing.

Randor Guy : *Kanniyin Kaadhali* and all?

Ramanathan : No, they didn't have to take any place there. They had their own studios in Coimbatore.

Randor Guy : Maybe it was later.

Ramanathan : Probably after they left Coimbatore and came over here probably, they might have...

Randor Guy : What was the reception to *Kanniyin Kaadhali*? It was not very successful?

Ramanathan : It was fairly successful. Couldn't have been called a hit, a big hit or anything like that. But whatever they spent, they made.

Randor Guy : Because A K Shekhar told me many years later, just before he died, you could count it as a flop. You know how softly he used to talk.

Ramanathan : Yes, I know.

Randor Guy : “You could count it as a flop. *Flop le kanakkudaan.*” I don’t think he recalled it as successful. In the sense it was very artistic, it was well made and all that but then we found that these Shakespearean dramas when presented as it is will not gel very well with the Indian public.

Ramanathan : It was not presented as it is. I mean the general play was there but there were certain additions, embellishments and so on. And I don’t think it as a flop, because it was done in 6 months’ time and the budget probably was very low. You see, except for the costumes and settings, there was nothing much to be spent on.

Randor Guy : Maybe it was not such a big success.

Ramanathan : No, it was not a big hit or anything.

Randor Guy : As Ramnath and Shekhar would have expected under their name...

Ramanathan : Ah probably.

Randor Guy : I think that was the first film they gave after they left Gemini.

Ramanathan : Gemini yes.

Randor Guy : Ramnath-Shekhar.

Ramanathan : As independent directors, they worked together, yes.

02:24:29-02:28:44

Randor Guy : And after *Kanniyin Kaadhali*, did your association with Ramnath stop?

Ramanathan : Well actually, towards the end of that film, I was confronted with an unpleasant situation. We had to do a, some shooting in Ooty. Outdoor.

Randor Guy : Nilgiris.

Ramanathan : Yes. And towards the end of the film, and when we went there, we were staying there and we had selected some locations for shooting and so on. Ramnath had already asked me to arrange for certain horses. There was some horse riding to be done and there was an old lady who was having those horses.

Randor Guy : In Ooty? A Britisher?

Ramanathan : In Ooty, yes. She was a Britisher. So, he said, “See that lady and ask for these horse to be ready”. Because she always wanted intimation to be given in advance.

Randor Guy : I see. She had so many animals?

Ramanathan : Yes, lot of them. He said, “You better go and see this lady and fix it. Arrange it for such and such a time on such and such a date” and I said, “All right”. And unfortunately for me, I probably was engaged in some script work and this and that.

Randor Guy : Which film was that?

Ramanathan : *Kanniyin Kaadhali*.

Randor Guy : Oh, I see.

Ramanathan : And so, I asked this production manager...

Randor Guy : Who was that?

Ramanathan : It was C Sundaram.

Randor Guy : Who made that Babu films. Who was a deaf man? They used to call him *Sevuttu* Sundaram (Deaf Sundaram). He was a driver I think earlier.

Ramanathan : Earlier he was Somasundaram's chauffeur.

Randor Guy : Yes.

Ramanathan : Then he became a production manager.

Randor Guy : Then producer.

Ramanathan : And as a production manager he was there. So, I told him, "You better go and see this lady. I'll give you the address and you ask her to fix it up and you get these horses in such and such place. In the morning, early in the morning by that time". He said "All right" and took the address and he kept quiet. I didn't know that he kept quiet. I asked him a day later and he said, "Yes don't worry" and third day also he said, "Yes". And so when the day came for the shooting, in the morning, we were all there in the location, everything was ready and all that and the horses didn't turn up. So Ramnath asked me, "What happened to the horses? Did you intimate the lady?" "Yes. She has already been intimidated." "Then why haven't they come?" I went and asked Sundaram within earshot of K. Ramnath, "What happened to the horses? Did you go and tell her and fix it up?" He said, "What horses?" (laughs)

Randor Guy : (Laughs).

Ramanathan : So, I said, "I gave you the address of the lady who is owning the horses and you said you've already seen her. I asked you twice and thrice and you said yes. What happened?" "I don't know anything about those horses." He let me down very badly. So, this annoyed Ramnath, naturally. He was thinking that I failed in my duties. And he said, "Is this the way an

Assistant Director conducts himself? There was no sense of responsibility on your part.” First time I saw him angry.

Randor Guy : I see. He never loses his temper. Very cool and calm.

Ramanathan : So, I felt first guilty that I was hurting him, on the other hand I was getting annoyed that he was...

Randor Guy : Shouting...

Ramanathan : Shouting in front of all those people. Then I decided that I have to leave.

Randor Guy : You were very impulsive at that time.

Ramanathan : Yes, very impulsive. I would suddenly disappear. Then without telling anybody, that night itself I booked my own train ticket and from Ooty, came down to Coimbatore and from Coimbatore I ran away to Madras.

Randor Guy : I see. So that was your, the end of your association with Ramnath.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : After that you never worked with him?

Ramanathan : No. It was unfortunate, an unfortunate incident. Of course, I failed in my duty, I agree.

Randor Guy : Did you meet him afterwards?

Ramanathan : Yes. I met him once or twice. He was...

Randor Guy : He had forgotten it all?

Ramanathan : Oh, he never remembered all that. He was a great man. And I felt guilty. I could remember that incident.

Randor Guy : He didn't ask you, 'Where did you go?'

Ramanathan : He asked me, "You shouldn't have left. You could have stayed on. After all these things happen. Everybody makes mistakes. You could have stayed on. At least you should have told me, I could have prevented you from going. You were such a good assistant to me." Well anyway my name is there in the title credits of the film. And that was one unfortunate incident. That is how I left Ramnath, then I came back to Madras.

02:28:45-02:29:44

Randor Guy : After that what did you do? After *Kanniyin Kaadhali*?

Ramanathan : Then again, I went back to Madras. Back to Lena Chettiar.

Randor Guy : Again?

Ramanathan : Yes. So, because these are the two sources with whom I was familiar and they knew me and I knew them.

Randor Guy : What was that Krishna Pictures doing at that time?

Ramanathan : At that time, they were doing a film called *Vanasundari*.

Randor Guy : *Vanasundari*. Raghunath. T. R Raghunath, P U Chinnappa, Rajakumari, Balaiiah...

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Varalakshmi and all were there in that film.

Ramanathan : Yes. And that film was about to be completed.

Randor Guy : Can you say something about this *Vanasundari*?

Ramanathan : No, I have no idea because I was not...

Randor Guy : It was folklorish.

Ramanathan : Yes folklorish.

Randor Guy : I saw it when I was a kid, a small boy. And it was a folklore. I don't think it was a popular success.

Ramanathan : It was not. *Krishna Bhakti* was better.

Randor Guy : And lots of kings, queens, women and that sort of stuff.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Of course, those days people used to see those films, folklore kind of films. You were not involved with *Vanasundari* at all?

Ramanathan : No, not with *Vanasundari* at all. I just went there as...

02:29:45-02:33:33

Randor Guy : You didn't say anything about Pakshiraja Studios. Now you came back to Madras after leaving Ramnath. And you said you were employed again by Lena Chettiar of Krishna Pictures.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : But you had nothing to do with *Vanasundari*, which Raghunath was directing at that time. What were you doing then? Just going to office, coming back...Or were you planning the next production?

Ramanathan : No, he had given me an idea to do a film as I said, a 'quickie'.

Randor Guy : What is that 'quickie'?

Ramanathan : *Tara Sasankam*.

Randor Guy : Oh, again that picture of the, the idea of the ...

Ramanathan : He said, "Why don't we do it?"

Randor Guy : Reactivated.

Ramanathan : Yes. He said, "Sometime we'll do it. You get ready for all this." He was paying me a salary and I was working on that. "And as soon as *Vanasundari* is over, we can take this and another film. A major film and a quickie". So, I was working on that. And during that period, I, there was a friend of mine, Sunday Times Ramaiah...

Randor Guy : Sunday Times was a popular weekly. It was started by Mr. Kamath, I think.

Ramanathan : I think so. But Ramaiah was known as Sunday Times Ramaiah. He was a good friend of mine. We used to frequent...

Randor Guy : He was popular journalist?

Ramanathan : Yes, a very good journalist. And he was very much attached to Lena Chettiar.

So, he told me that the Shaw Brothers of Singapore were looking for...

Randor Guy : Run Run Shaw.

Ramanathan : Run Run Shaw.

Randor Guy : Do you know the name of the other brother?

Ramanathan : Run Me Shaw.

Randor Guy : Run Me Shaw and Run Run Shaw. They were Chinese?

Ramanathan : Chinese brothers. He came down here to Delhi at one time. He said, "They are looking for some directors."

Randor Guy : The Shaw Brothers?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Of Singapore.

Ramanathan : That's what Ramaiah told me. He said, "Why don't you apply?" I said, "I don't know of films being made in Singapore. As far as I know I haven't heard of that."

"No, Shaw Bothers have been doing it. Why don't you go?"

So, I wrote an application and sent it to them, giving them my background and so on. Then, one fine day, they wrote to Lena Chettiar.

Randor Guy : To cross check?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : You gave Lena's reference?

Ramanathan : I said I was in Krishna Pictures under Lena Chettiar and so on. So, they asked him about me.

Randor Guy : You didn't tell Lena Chettiar?

Ramanathan : No, I didn't tell him, since I was not very much interested or keen on that. I was only concerned with Tamil films. When this came in, Lena Chettiar received the letter and next day he called me. He said, "What is this you've written to Shaw Brothers, Singapore saying that you want to direct films for them? And they've asked me to give a report on you. What kind of a report can I give? You didn't consult me. You didn't ask me anything. If you had asked me, it would have been different. You did this on your own. How can I recommend you?"

"Sir I didn't know there was a film industry in Singapore in the first place. It was something Ramaiah told me so I just... He told me just like that. I'm keener on working here."

"Do you want me to recommend? You should have consulted me," he said. He was a bit annoyed. So, I thought that chance was gone. "Never mind, I'll wait for Tamil films". The next day he called me and he said, "Read this letter." It was written in English by Sunday Times Ramaiah.

Randor Guy : Lena Chettiar did not know much of English?

Ramanathan : No, he didn't know any English at all. So, he read this letter and I found that he had recommended me so highly. "Actually, I wanted him to direct a film for me, he's so capable, with his talent, and he's a very talented assistant director who is good enough to be a director". So, they called me and I left for Singapore.

Randor Guy : You left Madras. Which year was this?

Ramanathan : 1949.

Randor Guy : 1949?

Ramanathan : Yes.

02:33:34-02:37:50

Randor Guy : I see. And earlier, were you connected with the Pakshiraja studios of S M Sriramulu Naidu?

Ramanathan : Yes, that was when I left *Krishna Bhakti*; there was a gap you see. I was not employed at that time so I went back to Coimbatore and I didn't get an opportunity initially. Surya, the editor whom I knew when I was in Jupiter, he was in Pakshiraja.

Randor Guy : He had left Central studios and gone over to Pakshiraja in the same town?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Which was originally Pioneer?

Ramanathan : Premier Cinema. Surya recommended me to S M Sri Ram Naidu.

Randor Guy : You didn't know him earlier?

Ramanathan : I didn't know him. He said, "Heard you are a good assistant director. You've done this and that." Gave my background to him and he engaged me on the production side.

Randor Guy : I see. Not on the directorial...

Ramanathan : No. He said, "You'll have to look over the production, assist me in the production side". I said "All right," and went there.

Randor Guy : What was the film he was making at that time? *Pavalakkodi*?

Ramanathan : *Pavalakkodi*, yes.

Randor Guy : T R Mahalingam, Rajakumari, Varadhan, N S K...

Ramanathan : Yes. He used to be a very hard taskmaster. I was ready for all that. I used to work very hard.

Randor Guy : In what way a hard taskmaster?

Ramanathan : He would see that everybody was always on their toes, or else always active. Everybody had to be that. And I had nothing to worry. But he was very keen that everybody should be alert. There was an incident I can tell you, when shooting was going on...

Randor Guy : *Pavalakkodi.*

Ramanathan : The clapper boy had to come and strike the clap.

Randor Guy : Slate.

Ramanathan : When he clapped it, it was very soft. The sound was not audible and there was a re-take.

Randor Guy : Re-take of the clap?

Ramanathan : No, the shot. The shot was gone.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : It was cut off and had to be taken again. Again, he did that and again he didn't strike it hard. There was a cut in the shot again. I said, "Look here you've got to strike the clap very hard. I couldn't even hear that sound". So Sriramulu Naidu was seated there. He said, "Lights off. Stop everything. Ramanathan, what is this you were telling him?" I said, "Sir the clap was not struck very loud. It was not even audible to me, so I said you've got to strike it

hard.”

“Why?”

“Because they’ll find it difficult to synchronize it later in the editing room.”

“I see. Is that your job? See isn’t there a sound engineer who listens to this... Isn’t he the man to judge?” So immediately he asked the sound engineer, Ramanathan. (He was also Ramanathan).

“Ramanathan!” Ramanathan could hear whatever was going on here. So when he said, “Ramanathan engineer, sound engineer Ramanathan, how was the clap? Did you hear the clap sound properly?”

“Oh, perfectly well sir!”

Then he said, “You see Ramanathan, you’ve taken up so much of our time which costs money and you’re trying to do somebody else’s job for them.” I said, “In the interest of the film sir I did it” He said, “Well there are others also who are interested in the film I hope” he said. That was probably for the others. (Laughs).

Randor Guy : (Laughs). He was quite a shot tempered man. I knew him quite well.

Ramanathan : And he would never sit. You know they were constructing something there, Sriram Naidu passed that place... That fellow who was laying the bricks you know, he would have worked the whole day. At that particular moment he would have been seated there, smoking. At that time Sriram Naidu would have walked there, and said, “*Idhukkaagava naan sambalam kuduthendirkena? Okaandu beedi puduchinderkewa?* You’re smoking a beedi while I’m paying you all the time while you’re smoking for your smoking the beedi.”

“No sir just now I sat and...”

“No, I won’t listen to you. Next time I find you doing this, I’ll send you away” He was that kind of a man.

Randor Guy : Very hard man. I knew him very well.

02:37:50-02:41:41

Randor Guy : Yesterday, I think we stopped when we were discussing the making of *Pavalakkodi*, at Pakshiraja Studios, Coimbatore, made by Mr. S. M. Sriramulu Naidu, where you told me that you had worked on the production side, not on the directorial side. You were also mentioning about the incident with smoking of the beedi by the worker and things like that. Can you tell me something about the making of *Pavalakkodi*? It's a mythological movie, a story of Arjuna and Pavalakkodi, Alli, and all that. Can you tell us something about what happened? Anything of interest, concern in the making of this film, or concerning Mr. Naidu?

Ramanathan : You see, he was a very hard task-master. He was a very strict disciplinarian, and he was very drastic in trying to implement things and so on. He was very particular. And I remember how he used to run those rushes of the previous day's shooting in the theatre.

Randor Guy : They had their own lab?

Ramanathan : Yes! Own lab, own theatre, yes.

Randor Guy : Who was the laboratorian do you remember??

Ramanathan : At that time, Mohan. He was there with him even earlier. So, they used to project these rushes and he used to call the technicians and everybody and ask them opinions or suggestions or remarks or whatever.

Randor Guy : Were the artists called to those rushes?

Ramanathan : Generally, not. If they were there, they used to come and we didn't mind that. So, one particular instance I remember was while they were projecting the rushes of the previous day's shooting, there was a lamp, *Kuthu Vilakku*, you know?

Randor Guy : The traditional lamp of South India.

Ramanathan : Yes. It was there being lit by T. R. Rajakumari.

Randor Guy : That was a shot?

Ramanathan : In a long shot.

Randor Guy : Of lighting the lamp.

Ramanathan : Lighting the lamp. And that particular shot had some trouble, because he projected over and over again, and he asked everybody, 'Do you find anything wrong in these rushes? Is there anything to say?' and so on. And everybody said, 'Perfectly all right. Everything is fine, there's nothing wrong'. Then again, he projected the rush, the same thing again. And they said, 'No we don't find anything wrong'. But I had noticed one flaw there and I said, 'Sir, in the long shot, Rajakumari is lighting the lamp with the right hand but in the close-up, she's using the left hand'.

Randor Guy : So, there was a continuity jump?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Which, nobody noticed? The assistant director and others...

Ramanathan : Nobody noticed, and there was a continuity assistant!

Randor Guy : Who was the continuity assistant?

Ramanathan : It was Raghavan, who later became a producer.

Randor Guy : That Malini Raghavan. He married a north Indian...He made some Hindi films, also.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Even with M. G. R. So, he was already there?

Ramanathan : He was there. And he was the continuity assistant. Then he said, 'Raghavan? What, what do you say? Am I paying you for this? You're supposed to have seen all this!' He gave some excuse. So, he said, 'Fine him five rupees!'

Randor Guy : Just like that! Like a college professor!

Ramanathan : Oh, yes. 'Fine him five rupees. Then only he would realize'. He would do such things.

Randor Guy : He was a very strict man!

Ramanathan : Very strict man.

Randor Guy : So far as work was concerned.

Ramanathan : He was also a nice man in a subtle way, because he remembered people. Even when he went abroad, he would send pictures and cards to all his people, all his staff, including me. He remembered people.

02:41:42-02:46:57

Randor Guy : Who were the other assistants who worked with you on *Pavalakkodi*? You mentioned about Malini Raghavan, who were the other assistants? Do you remember?

Ramanathan : There was no assistant director as such.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : One Narayan Iyengar was there.

Randor Guy : Narayanan Iyer.

Ramanathan : Yes. He was known to Sriramulu Naidu even earlier. He had worked under him earlier. And he was in charge of...

Randor Guy : Who was handling the briefing of dialogues to the artists, coaching them about modulation, inflection of the voice...?

Ramanathan : Sriramulu Naidu himself used to do all that.

Randor Guy : He was capable of all that.

Ramanathan : Yes. But I also used to be there with him.

Randor Guy : I see.

Ramanathan : And he used to ask me to read the dialogues.

Randor Guy : Not strictly your job as a production man.

Ramanathan : Also, yes. He used to ask me to do that also.

Randor Guy : And Pavalakkodi, I think, was played by T. R. Rajakumari, who at that time was one of the superstars of Tamil cinema.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Can you tell us something about T. R. Rajakumari?

Ramanathan : Well, as I know her, as an artist I knew her in *Pavalakkodi* and again in *Krishna Bhakti*. One thing I have to say about her is that she was always such a big star at that time, she was very famous, especially after *Haridas* had launched, she was already a big star. But she was

very unassuming, very quiet. If she was not engaged in the shooting, she would just go to a corner and sit down in the chair and she would not bother anybody or disturb anybody.

Randor Guy : Not talk much.

Ramanathan : Not even talk to anybody. But if she was expected to come to the Studios in the morning at 7 o' clock, she would be there at 6:30.

Randor Guy : Very punctual.

Ramanathan : Yes, very punctual, for her make-up, and her costuming and everything, she would be ready even before others are ready. Yes, she was such a star who was very punctual.

Randor Guy : Very time conscious, very rare these days.

Ramanathan : Yes (laughs). She was a very fine example of that. And she would never express anything which would hurt anybody.

Randor Guy : A perfect lady.

Ramanathan : Perfect lady, she was a lady of few words. She minded her own business, concentrated on her acting and did her performance well with the appreciation of the director and all concerned and the producers and so on, and leave.

Randor Guy : And talking of an artist like Rajakumari coming to the make-up at 6:30, I want to ask another question. These days, even very minor artists, they have a make-up man of their own, they have a costumer of their own, and they have all sorts of bottle washers or *chamchas*, as they are called, around them, breathing all the time down their necks. In those days, did these stars, like Rajakumari, have their own make-up man, hair-dresser, or they only used studio facilities for that?

Ramanathan : No, as far as I remember in the films I worked, there was no such thing, you know.

Randor Guy : There was no individual make-up...

Ramanathan : No, there was nothing of the kind. In SMS Studios, we had... what's his name? ... Shankar Rao as a make-up man, and he was the studio make-up man. Even P. U. Chinnappa, or T. R. Rajakumari, or anybody who came there...

Randor Guy : They were only made up by the...

Ramanathan : Made up by the...

Randor Guy : Nobody was allowed to have the...?

Ramanathan : Nobody was allowed.

Randor Guy : Now, today, the producer is expected to pay for the services of these private make-up men, hairdressers and all that.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : And they even bring women to carry their water bottles... they are bottle carriers, for whom again the producers are expected to pay. So, all sorts of things are happening — this seven- star culture, pampering the artists. We don't know who introduced these things.

Ramanathan : But then, in those days, we had a very famous Hari Babu. Everybody, all the stars were very keen or particular that he should do the make-up.

Randor Guy : I used to hear from his son Mannu, who is with Shivaji Ganesan, that his father used to sit at home, some house in T. Nagar where he lived, and all these artists used to come there, get their make-up done by Hari Babu, and then go to their particular studio, XYZ,

wherever they were acting. He said, “Such was the demand of my father’s services those days”. Of course, he was not praising his own father, it was all true. I didn’t know Hari Babu at all, I only knew his son.

Ramanathan : In fact, he made up for me also when I was acting as the minister in *Krishna Bhakthi*, apart from being an assistant director. And he placed a wig on my head and said, “You know? This wig, you see that? You know, this wig... he always used, ‘You see that? You see that?’”

Randor Guy : Like a mannerism.

Ramanathan : “You see that? You know who this wig is from? Where it is from?” “No, I don’t know Babuji, tell me who it is from?” “It was used be V Nagaiah”.

Randor Guy : (inaudible) In *Vemana*. By K. V. Reddy

Ramanathan : Yeah. ‘So, you see? I’m placing this on your head, you might also become a great actor like him!’

02:46:58-02:49:18

Randor Guy : What was your role in *Krishna Bhakthi*?

Ramanathan : I was the minister to this king... D. Balasubramaniam. That was a villainous character. I am the one who instigates him against P. U. Chinnappa.

Randor Guy : Can you tell me something about Mr. D. Balasubramaniam? The famous character-actor who used to play father roles and all that.

Ramanathan : Yes. In fact, when I worked in *My Son*, the first film that I worked in, he was the father. He played the role of the father for N. Krishnamurthy. He had come from the stage. And

he was a very conscientious actor, he was always reading books, studying literature, and so on and so forth.

Randor Guy : Was he a very educated man?

Ramanathan : Not in the sense of school education, no. He was a man from the stage.

Randor Guy : He loved learning.

Ramanathan : And loved learning. A very religious man. I remember later on, because he... I knew him in the film *My Son*, and also in the film *Krishna Bhakthi*. Later on, when I came back from Singapore, he met me at the TKS Brothers' film company, I mean... Drama Company. And he said, 'It's a good thing I met you. I'm performing at Sri Kandha Sashti'.

Randor Guy : Religious function.

Ramanathan : Religious function. And he asked me to come, invited me to his house and I attended the function in which another gentleman was also seated.

Randor Guy : Who was that?

Ramanathan : This gentleman was M. K. Thyagaraja Bhagavatar.

Randor Guy : At that time, was he broke?

Ramanathan : He was very much down. And he was also there. And D. Balasubramaniam was very religious.

Randor Guy : Did you know M. K. Thyagaraja Bhagavatar?

Ramanathan : Well, I went to see him, as I told you, but I could not see him.

Randor Guy : During the making of *Thiruneelakantar*. He was inaccessible.

Ramanathan : And later on, when I went to Jupiter Pictures for the film *My Son*, he was supposed to act in *Sri Murugan*.

Randor Guy : As Murugan?

Ramanathan : As Murugan. And in *Valmiki*, he had to act as Valmiki.

Randor Guy : They had booked him for all of those?

Ramanathan : Booked him for all that. And I went there and they were shooting a scene.

Randor Guy : With Bhagavatar? For *Murugan*?

Ramanathan : No, for *Valmiki*.

Randor Guy : So, they had started work with Bhagavatar for *Valmiki*. Directed by Sundar Rao Nadkarni.

2:49:19-02:51:50

Ramanathan : And U R Jeevaratnam was acting there. And Bhagavatar came along in the scene, and... before coming into the scene, he spoke to Sundar Rao Nadkarni in English.

Randor Guy : In English!

Ramanathan : Yes, Bhagavatar.

Randor Guy : So, he had learned English by that time.

Ramanathan : He had already learned and all of that. He said, 'You told me that you would come the other day and you didn't come. Why didn't you come?' Then Sundar Rao Nadkarni said, 'Excuse me, Sir, I was busy here and there,' and something like that. 'No, no, no, that is no excuse, you should have come'.

Randor Guy : He spoke so well!

Ramanathan : Then, 'All right, all right, carry on with the work,' and then he had gone. Then the first dialogue that somebody said to U. R. Jeevaratnam, who was supposed to be playing an important role there...

Randor Guy : In *Valmiki*?

Ramanathan : In *Valmiki*. Whom Thyagaraja Bhagavatar had already met and gone. Then somebody comes and tells her, '*Amma, Kaidhikku marana dhandanai*'.

Randor Guy : 'Death sentence for the prisoner'.

Ramanathan : Yes. And she says in shock, "Enna, marana dhandanaiya?", She said that, U. R. Jeevaratnam.

Randor Guy : Very prophetic.

Ramanathan : So, we didn't know the implication of that dialogue at that time. But it so happened that he was arrested.

Randor Guy : He was arrested in connection with that Lakshmikanthan murder case where he was given life imprisonment.

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Later on, all that happened and by the time he was released, in '47, I think, he was totally a ruined man. He never got up from that attack. From the shock he received. That's part of film history.

Ramanathan : Talking of the Lakshmikanthan case, Bhagavatar of course couldn't take it.

Randor Guy : Yes, he took it very badly.

Ramanathan : Very badly. But N. S. Krishnan, I was there when N. S. Krishnan was hurrying up with all his films.

Randor Guy : He expected to be arrested?

Ramanathan : Expected to be arrested.

Randor Guy : What about the film he was making at that time? Lakshmikanthan murder case, murder was in '44 November. Actually, November 8th, he was murdered. And Bhagavatar was arrested some time in December. End of December '44. N. S. Krishnan must have been around that time.

Ramanathan : Around that time. They were hurrying up with a lot of films. I can't remember. Films from Madras and so on, they were two-reeler comedies, you know. They used to be fitted into the picture. So, several pictures, comedies, were being done here in Coimbatore in a hurry, so that he could collect as much money as possible, for this case, which they were anticipating. And it so happened I was there.

2:51:50-02:58:24

Randor Guy : We were talking about the arrest of... before, what happened about N. S. Krishnan.

Ramanathan : Yes, you see, N. S. Krishnan was in a hurry to finish all his films, you know, they used to take two-reeler comedies for every feature film in which he was booked.

Randor Guy : And how did you work? What was the working style of N. S. Krishnan? Can you explain?

Ramanathan : Yes, he used to see the film, the main film that had already been done, or almost done, or whatever was done and he would follow the story and so on and he would have an idea of the whole film. Then he would construe his own comedy with Madhuran and his... he had a small troop; Pulimoottai Ramasamy, R R Kuppusamy and so on...M R Swaminathan, Kaka Radhakrishnan... and he would construct some sequence which would fit into the main film. But the comedy, 2-reel comedy, or whatever it was, whatever length he chose, would be shot by him. He would direct it. First, Krishnan Panju used to be there. Krishnan and Panju. But it was he who would conduct the whole...

Randor Guy : So, he was good at direction even then?

Ramanathan : Yes, yes. He would even... placement of camera, how to operate the camera, and he knew all that.

Randor Guy : He was a good technician apart from being a comedian.

Ramanathan : Yes. He was. And he used to ask Narayana Kavi...

Randor Guy : Udumalai Narayana Kavi. His favourite poet.

Ramanathan : He used to ask him to write the lyrics for his song and he used to give him ideas and Narayana Kavi used to write the lyrics.

Randor Guy : These comedy portions of N. S. Krishnan were shot entirely by him?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Without the director of the main picture being in it?

Ramanathan : Generally, not. See, there may have been a few cases like, you know, he had great respect for Raja Chandrashekhar. And he would abide by Raja Chandrashekhar's directions. Of course, giving his own suggestions and so on. So, people like that, he used to respect.

Randor Guy : But mostly, he did it on his own?

Ramanathan : Yes, mostly.

Randor Guy : And then, who will do the editing part of it? He used to edit it himself?

Ramanathan : No. That was being done by Panju I think.

Randor Guy : Panju was an editor? Started as an editor?

Ramanathan : Yes, he used to do that.

Randor Guy : And he used to give the reels to be added to the main film?

Ramanathan : Yes. So, he had the whole thing, and...

Randor Guy : And for that he was given a lump sum on a contract. Sahasranamam told me that this was how N. S. K. used to work. So, he was a very creative person. Just not a comedian.

Ramanathan : Yes. Apart from that, I have to mention something else also because I was told this by an associate of N. S. Krishnan, I forget his name now...how N. S. Krishnan was given this style of performing comedy. You know, Raja Sandow took a film called *Chandrakantha*.

Randor Guy : *Savukkadi Chandrakantha.*

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : The fake Swamiji...

Ramanathan : Yes. So, at that time, when Raja Sandow was a very famous actor in Hindi, at that time. And he went from Pudukkottai to Bombay. And there, when he was directing *Chandrakantha*, he gave an idea how that performance should be done...this comedy, his character, mannerisms, the way of walking, gestures, and so on and so forth. So, he implanted that sort of a style.

Randor Guy : Raja Sandow? In N. S. Krishnan?

Ramanathan : In N. S. Krishnan. And N. S. Krishnan followed it. He kept it up and later developed on it by himself. And the same way, Kali N. Ratnam also.

Randor Guy : Another great comedian.

Ramanathan : Yes, who had a stagy style of acting, for whom he created a style. *Swamivaal! Yogabhyasaththukku selvomaa?* (Swamiji! Shall we go for Yoga practice?) And the way that he was doing, he used to show the gestures and all that.

Randor Guy : These are famous lines in *Chandrakanta*. I believe that *Yogabhyaasam* was kind of a euphemism for this sexual intercourse.

Ramanathan : Yes, exactly, that's what was happening there. (laughs). You would see the man going in with his dhoti and coming out with a sari. (laughs)

Randor Guy : (laughs) That's how they presented it.

Randor Guy : They interchanged it. Unfortunately, that film is not available for us to see today.

Ramanathan : So many goods are not available, unfortunately.

Randor Guy : Did you know N. S. K well, or...? Because you worked with him in that *Krishna Bhakti* and...

Ramanathan : No, as I said, he did all the comedy...

Randor Guy : So, you didn't have anything to do?

Ramanathan : No, I didn't have much to do. But we used to converse and talk. Whenever we used to meet, I used to greet him. Once, we had to play cricket in Newtowne Studios while I ...

Randor Guy : N. S. K was interested in cricket?

Ramanathan : Yes, yes. He was playing cricket in the knocked-down sets of Newtowne Studios. And I was assistant director in *Krishna Bhakthi* and I was hurrying to the make-up room at that time. Suddenly the cricket ball, you know, just touched my ear and flew off.

Randor Guy : N. S. Krishnan? He made that stroke?

Ramanathan : Yes. So, I was just rubbing my ear, and he came running and asked, "What happened? Sir, what happened? Did the ball hit you?", he was very much upset. I said, "No, nothing is wrong Sir, I'm perfectly all right". "No, I want to see this attended to immediately". "No, don't worry, it's alright".

Randor Guy : He was concerned about your safety.

Ramanathan : Nice man, he was very jovial in his conversations.

Randor Guy : And all his comedy portions, I was told by Mr. Sahasranamam, that he preferred to shoot in Coimbatore. Most of his comedy portions.

Ramanathan : Yes, he did quite a lot of work, in Coimbatore.

Randor Guy : At which studio?

Ramanathan : At Central Studios.

Randor Guy : Central Studios. Was there any particular reason for that? Why he avoided Madras Studios and went for that? Because even his Ashoka Films, under which banner he made a number of films like *Chandramayi*, *Buddhimaan Balawaan Avaan*, *Naveena Vikraman* in this Ashoka Films, the address itself is given as Care of Central Studios, Coimbatore.

Ramanathan : Yes. He had, probably, I don't know, but he had a great fascination for Central Studios and he used to come there with a big program. Not just one film, he would do several things. Comedies for several films at a stretch. No disturbance. In Newton Studios, there used to be a waitlist, it used to be booked and always engaged for some shooting or the other. And probably, he found it very much easier to work in Coimbatore than Madras.

02:58:25-02:59:37

Randor Guy : Talking of Newton Studios, I'd like you to say something, it could be (inaudible) today. I believe that demand on the studio time at Newton was so great that producers and production managers of film companies used to bribe the people there to get the call sheet. And that was one source of income to the big-wigs, you know who they are...and when I spoke to one of them, who is no more, he more or less agreed that it was true. That they used to get a lot of unaccounted money this way, and of course, that's very sad. And B. N. Reddy later on told me, he also confirmed this, how K. V. Reddy, who was then looking after production, was sent to negotiate for days, things like that. And they had a rate for giving the call sheet during the daytime and a lesser rate that is to be paid to these people; not the studio call sheet, that was different and on account and the night call sheet used to be slightly less, there was a concession in this money for (inaudible) and for whatever purpose they were using. And that was the reason (audio cut off).

02:59:38-03:15:49

Randor Guy : We were talking about this system that was in vogue in Newtone- how the bigwigs of the studio were being tipped by the producers and how B N Reddy got insulted, hurt and irritated that this kind of corruption...it was a form of corruption...

Ramanathan : Yes, yes.

Randor Guy : No two opinions about it. And in fact, "That's what made me think of having my own studio and that's the main reason I was 'provoked' (this was the word he used) to think of a studio and that's how Vauhini came into existence", he said.

Ramanathan : Yes, Vauhini studio.

Randor Guy : We'll go back to NS Krishnan. You were wanting to say something more.

Ramanathan : You see, while we were hurrying up to finish all those films, various pictures that he was under contract with, the next day they knew, he was going to be arrested... already they knew that he was going to be arrested the next day. The previous day he was standing under the tree inside the Central studio compound near the Vinayagar temple...

Randor Guy : The temple inside the studio?

Ramanathan : Inside the studio, a small temple, a statue was there and they used to have some puja. T A Madhuram was there, she was very sad, very much depressed and she was weeping. I knew about this Lakshmikanthan case that was going on, but didn't know he was going to be arrested the next day. He said to Madhuram, 'Why are you crying? Don't worry, I'll go and come back. I'm sure to come back, don't worry, I'll certainly come back'.

Randor Guy : He was consoling her...

Ramanathan : Consoling her, but she was still not satisfied. She thought it was going to be a matter of life imprisonment and she may never see him again out of jail. He was very persuasive, trying to console her. I saw him then and of course the next day he was arrested.

Randor Guy : It was sensational...

Ramanathan : Then again, I saw him as soon as he was released, in 1947.

Randor Guy : The second half of 47...

Ramanathan : That was when my friend K R Venugopal Sharma whom I knew as a comedian in *My Son*- he had started a company called Green Pictures...

Randor Guy : A Production company?

Ramanathan : Yes, he was about to do some film with T S Balaiah, Mariappa Swamigal, Natraj Shakuntala and all sorts of people. He had already arranged a function to receive N S Krishnan upon his release from jail straightaway. He asked me to attend that function.

Randor Guy : Where was this function held, you remember?

Ramanathan : At Green Pictures, along Santhome High Road. Just opposite All India Radio there was an old building where he had that company, Green Pictures. So, there was this function which the Late director K Subramaniam presided. And he introduced him. No introduction was necessary because all the audience knew N S Krishnan. M K Radha was there I remember, people like Sahasranamam were there and then he introduced him. Then N S Krishnan stood up. He was a different man now, had put on weight...

Randor Guy : Put on weight, coming out of prison?

Ramanathan : Yes. He looked much better, nice glow on his face and all that but when he started talking, he said, 'I don't know what to speak, my knees are shaking. It's been ages since I met and spoke to you all. You've invited me here to speak but I can't seem to find any words. But I have the courage to say this...at least once in their lifetime, everyone should go to the jail!'

Randor Guy : (Laughs) I see.

Ramanathan : 'At least once, one should go to jail. Because, only out there one gets to know the real world. Only inside the prison, you know what the world is. I'm not like Thyagaraja Bhagavata. He is a broken man and has gone to pieces. I can say this as I have a little fortitude left. He has gone away, unable to say any of this. But I can say this, because while in jail, one gets to know who the genuine friend is, who is loyal, who is a scoundrel, who is treacherous...one gets to know the true colour of people'. Later on, I came to know what had happened. Several producers had given advance to him and to Thyagaraja Bhagavata and those pictures were held up; and most of the producers pestered them even when they were in jail, for returning the advance.

Randor Guy : Oh God!

Ramanathan : So, they were very much down-hearted.

Randor Guy : What Shakespeare would call 'the unkindest cut'!

Ramanathan : The 'unkindest cut of all'. But of course, in the case of N S Krishnan, Madhuras had worked hard to get the money. Went through a lot of difficulties, was helped by lots of people. And the only producer as far as I know, who went there and N S Krishnan asked him, 'Lena Chettiar! You too have come to ask us to return the advance, have you?'

Randor Guy : He went to see them in the prison?

Ramanathan : Yes. And he replied, 'What do you mean, there's no question of taking back the advance!' 'No, it's just that everyone has been asking us to return the advance money. So, one thought you too had the same agenda'. 'Not at all! I won't even think about it. I came to see if any help or power is necessary, if I could help you in some form or the other, I'd certainly do my best and see that you are released'.

Randor Guy : This was Lena Chettiar...Krishna Pictures...sincere friend!

Ramanathan : A very sincere friend. That was one experience that I had in the case of N S Krishnan. Very good example of a man who stood by, with all his great qualities.

Randor Guy : I had heard of this Green Pictures reception, but did not know the details. I read about it somewhere when I was doing research for a story that I did on the LakshmiKanthan murder case, it was serialized , which created a very big sensation last year. At that time, I read about this Green Pictures' reception and only knew that he had made a speech. I didn't know that people pestered him to return the advance, inside the prison!

Ramanathan : He didn't express it in his speech, no.

Randor Guy : But you came to know about it... who his friends were... very interesting. You were talking about *Pavalakkodi*. In *Pavalakkodi*, the hero was one T E Varadhan, who's now in some stationery paper business.

Ramanathan : I think he was a lawyer.

Randor Guy : He was not a lawyer. He left film making, joined some stationery company and now

he's on his own. I see him now and then. I knew him again when I was with Gopalratnam. What happened was...this might interest you- S M Sriramulu Naidu filed a case against T E Varadhan for breach of contract and damages; because he did not report for work for *Kanchana* or *Mithila Vilas* or one such story by Lakshmi, which Sriramulu Naidu produced. And because it was a small role, I suppose Varadhan didn't bother to go to Coimbatore. And he took him to court and asked for damages and things like that. There was lot of exchange of very acrimonious correspondence and Gopalratnam was the lawyer for Sriramulu Naidu also, so Sriramulu Naidu was advised by Gopalratnam, 'Varadhan has left films, he's doing some job somewhere, he's a small fry, why do you want to fight that boy? He did something and he has gone away. You should take it in the proper spirit, you are after all too big for him'.

Ramanathan : (laughs)

Randor Guy : 'No Sir, you don't know, that fellow is very mischievous'. Varadhan also used to come to Gopalratnam's office, because he had a boss who had a stationery company who was also an office client. So, he would also come and there'd be lot of shouting and all that; finally what Sriramulu Naidu did was, he took the case to Raja Iyer who was a famous lawyer, an advocate-general and made him file it. And Gopalratnam appeared for T E Varadhan and Naidu lost that case. He went on appeal and it was heard by P V Rajamannar and again on appeal he lost it. Finally, when he had to pay, this fellow asked for counter damages, cost and all that and he was very nasty about it. That was the period when I came to know Sriramulu Naidu intimately. He used to pour out all his anger against Varadhan to me because I knew Varadhan as well. I used to talk to Sriramulu Naidu in Telugu all the time, he being a Naidu and he was fond of me for that. '*Ra ra, kurcho*' (Come come, sit down) he'd say and go on talking. And that's how I came to know him intimately. And did you know this T E Varadhan?

Ramanathan : I knew him only in that film.

Randor Guy : After that I think he faded...

Ramanathan : I don't know...

Randor Guy : Now he's in T Nagar, you can see him going about...his son became a successful cricketer, T E Srinivasan.

Ramanathan : Yes, I've seen his son.

Randor Guy : He plays for the state. He said he had forgotten all about films. And what about this M S Sarojini, she did the role of Alli, I think. What do you know of her, what do you think of her?

Ramanathan : She was a good singer. She used to sing and act. I knew she did the heroine's role in *Jagadhalapradhapan* with P U Chinnappa; I've watched her from then. Here of course in *Pavalakkodi*, she was almost like T R Rajakumari, very quiet...I think she was someone Naidu was personally interested in...

Randor Guy : Yes, Naidu was personally interested...

Ramanathan : That's what I used to hear. Later on, I think she was acting only in his films after he took interest in her. She also faded. I don't know where she has gone. That was Sarojini. And T R Mahalingam played Lord Krishna.

Randor Guy : Did you know him before *Pavalakkodi*?

Ramanathan : No, I didn't know him earlier.

Randor Guy : What was your impression of T R Mahalingam at that time?

Ramanathan : At that time of course, he was a big star and was quite busy. It was very difficult to get his call sheet and so on. He used to come and finish his work in a hurry. He had his own production company Sukumar Pictures, was a busy man.

Randor Guy : That got him into disaster...

Ramanathan : But I knew it later on when I directed him.

Randor Guy : We'll talk about it later. Now, talking of *Pavalakkodi*, I was in my final school year vacation. I remember a particular song by N S Krishnan which had words in Hindi. The song goes like '*Kya karna Bhagwan*'. Do you remember that?

Ramanathan : Yes. Yes.

Randor Guy : Addressed to Lord Krishna. I used to wonder as a student, how during Lord Krishna's period, with Arjuna, Alli and such mythological characters, somebody like N S Krishnan was singing a song in Hindi! I don't know how people reacted to it.

Ramanathan : (Laughs)

Randor Guy : Do you remember that?

Ramanathan : As I said, he used to do the comedy sequences.

Randor Guy : Nobody bothered that he was doing a song in Hindi...it became popular '*Kya Karna Bhagwan...*'

Ramanathan : (Laughs)

Randor Guy : He took quite a lot of poetic license or whatever you call it. After this *Pavalakkodi*, what did you do, was it a success?

Ramanathan : I don't think so. He had spent quite a lot of money on that, it wasn't that successful.

Randor Guy : Who was the music director for *Pavalakkodi*? Subbaraman?

Ramanathan : Mm, no.

Randor Guy : Subbaiah Naidu?

Ramanathan : S M Subbaiah Naidu, Pakshiraja and somebody else.

Randor Guy : Who was the cameraman?

Ramanathan : V Krishnan.

Randor Guy : Surya was the editor?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : What was the background of S M S Naidu, can you tell me? How he came into films...?

Ramanathan : I don't know much about that, but he had a hotel called Devi Hotel opposite Coimbatore station.

Randor Guy : Was it a hotel or just a restaurant?

Ramanathan : Restaurant and lodge.

Randor Guy : Even artists used to stay there?

Ramanathan : Yes.

Randor Guy : Why I'm asking this question is, some years back, B N Rao told me, that was the time Central Studios was started-1935-1937 when R K Ramakrishna Chettiar brother of R K Shanmugam Chettiar took B N Rao from Calcutta, they made *Tukaram* that was their first film under their production. At that time, he said S M Sriramulu Naidu had just finished his intermediate college in some place, had come back to Coimbatore. His father wanted him to enter the business. The father was one of the directors of Central Studios and the son was taken in as Chief Executive or Executive Director. He also said Sriramulu Naidu's father was a magistrate or a munsif or something like that.

Ramanathan : I had no idea.

Randor Guy : He was a judicial officer, he said; and because of his judicial office- magistrate or subordinate or whatever, he commanded lot of respect and power those days, which was assumed by Naidu as well- because Naidu was a very egoistic, autocratic man... never liked anybody talking to him. Snobbish and feudal. He said all these he inherited from his father. You didn't know about his background?

Ramanathan : No, I didn't know much about that. I only knew he was having this Devi hotel.

Randor Guy : Does it still exist? Recently I went to Coimbatore but I didn't see any...

Ramanathan : I don't think so. Lot of lodges in front of (inaudible)

03:15:50-03:26:41

Randor Guy : And after *Pavalakkodi*, what?

Ramanathan : I went to Krishna Pictures, back again to Krishna Pictures. And from there of course when they were doing *Vana Sundari*, after finishing it I got the offer from Shaw Brothers and went to...

Randor Guy : Singapore. When was this?

Ramanathan : 1949.

Randor Guy : And how long did you stay in Singapore?

Ramanathan : I stayed there for 8 years, up to 1957.

Randor Guy : you were there for 8 long years! What were you doing, directing pictures?

Ramanathan : I was taken as a director but initially, I was asked to write a script for a film which L Krishnan, another colleague of mine- was from Malaysia but had worked for a short time under K Subramanyam...

Randor Guy : L Krishnan?

Ramanathan : Yes, L Krishnan. They wanted me to write a story and script for him to direct.

Randor Guy : For Krishnan to direct? That was your first assignment?

Ramanathan : First assignment. They said you do this first and then we'll give you an opportunity to direct. So, I wrote a story. In Malay it was called *Bhakti*- having the same meaning- they use a lot of Sanskrit in Malay, you know; *Shorba*, *duniya* and such...this was a blend of Wuthering Heights and some other created ideas. After this first assignment of Krishnan's film was over, they asked me to direct a film of my own and to prepare for the next film. I did a script called *Kembaar*.

Randor Guy : What does that mean?

Ramanathan : Meaning Twin Sisters, Twins actually. I wrote the story. The producer Run Run Shaw had his office on Robinson Road, far away from the studios. Studios were in a separate place, Jalan Ampas. It was a wooden structured building at that time. I was disappointed when I saw the studio. I was thinking maybe I'd come to a place where probably D W Griffith and Charlie Chaplin were working... (laughs)

Randor Guy : Gary Cooper...

Ramanathan : But was a bit disappointed. But then, I had already come and I had to do my job. Then I worked on this and they used to give full freedom. I wrote my own story and script. But the dialogues were translated by my Malay assistant. I knew Malay because I was born there. I could even correct the dialogues if they made any mistake. I wrote the story and was told to choose whichever actor I wanted. Even the music director...they gave full me freedom. They wanted me to make a production that would beat all their previous productions. And economically too, they were cost-conscious. They gave me an idea about that. I picked up an actress who used to dance in a group.

Randor Guy : A group dancer?

Ramanathan : A group dancer among the chorus girls called Mariam who had a good photogenic

face and was quite charming. I thought of casting her as the heroine.

Randor Guy : Sounds like Joan Crawford's story from Hollywood. (laughs)

Ramanathan : For the hero, they advertised in the papers. We called for a lot of people. (Inaudible) came, a police inspector came, a waiter in a restaurant came and I filtered them and finally I selected one actor called Amin, a new face. Mariam was also new and for camera man, I didn't want a famous one. Asked the assistant cameraman a Chinese, to operate the camera. He was already working on several films as the assistant cameraman and I made him the cameraman. The manager of the studio himself was the editor, he was a relative of Run Run Shaw. And we had Filipinos doing the music for Malaysians, they were very talented in music. And the twin role was done by this girl.

Randor Guy : You could do the masking and double role...

Ramanathan : We could do all that.

Randor Guy : The facilities for masking were...

Ramanathan : Yes, everything was done there. When the picture was finally over, we had Soliyano a Filipino to do the music for us... I'm sorry, Yousafama was the music director, Soliyano came later. Finally, the picture was completed. We used to calculate the cost from the day we started shooting. Every day, because all the artists were on monthly salary. Even that was accounted. And finally, it came to about 64000 dollars.

Randor Guy : How much was that in rupees?

Ramanathan : At that time, it was Rs 96000.

Randor Guy : Quite economical.

Ramanathan : They were very happy. Run Run Shaw came and hugged me and said, 'Wonderful! That's very nice. Because we have been spending 100,000, 115,000 and so on. This is quite good, even the film is very good, we like it very much!' So, he gave me another chance and I directed...

Randor Guy : In all, how many films did you do there during your 8 years stay?

Ramanathan : Actually, I did 24 feature films.

Randor Guy : In 8 years, all in Malay language?

Ramanathan : All in Malay.

Randor Guy : Did you specialize in any particular genre or made films in varied genres?

Ramanathan : Varied, they were all varied. Mostly social, family dramas, I also did fantasies. There was one film called (Inaudible).

Randor Guy : What does that mean?

Ramanathan : It means 'Magic Hand'. Actually, Run Run Shaw gave me an idea to try a film with something to do with magic...like flying in the air. Because the Malays that time favoured that. So, I did the film '*Magic Fan*' and its script. The hero was given a fan and if he swayed the fan, he'd go flying up in the air. It involved a lot of trick work.

Randor Guy : I know.

Ramanathan : By this time, I had already worked in several pictures. *Berdosa*, which was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*... so many films...(inaudible)

Randor Guy : Were you the only Indian technician working there for Shaw Brothers?

Ramanathan : When I went there, there were three of us. B H Rajhans was already there.

Randor Guy : From Punjab?

Ramanathan : A Sikh. He was a director, but his style of working was different as they used to do in the early days. Earlier than when I went there. Then L Krishnan came and we were three of us there. This went on till 1952. In between Rajhans did not do much work, Krishnan and I did quite a lot up to 52. In 52, they recruited more people. Then of course B N Rao came in 52, after I had done about 7 or 8 films.

Randor Guy : Who were the others, apart from B N Rao?

Ramanathan : Phani Majumdar.

Randor Guy : From Calcutta...he also worked in Malaya?

Ramanathan : He did 2 or 3 films. Then one Bhaskar came.

Randor Guy : Who was this Bhaskar?

Ramanathan : He had worked in the Sound Department in Vauhini or somewhere.

Randor Guy : In Vauhini?

Ramanathan : That's what he told the people there. I don't know where he worked, because I had not known him when he worked here earlier. Then they had Seetarama Sastry who was actually a poet...

Randor Guy : from Karnataka?

Ramanathan : Yes, H R Seetarama Sastry.

Randor Guy : He was a Kannada writer and film maker.

Ramanathan : He was connected with Honnappa Bhagavatar also.

Randor Guy : I Know.

Ramanathan : *Kalidasa* and so on.

Randor Guy : He also came to Malaya?

Ramanathan : He also came but went back saying Honnappa Bhagavatar wanted him to direct a film.

Randor Guy : Seetarama Sastry was fairly prominent in Kannada films for a certain period of time.

Ramanathan : He did about one or two films there. Then there was one Girimaji who came and worked for some time.

Randor Guy : Not the actor?

Ramanathan : No, no. But he was sent away by Shaw Brothers. We also sent B N Rao back after sometime.

Randor Guy : Were they not on contract?

Ramanathan : On monthly salary.

Randor Guy : What was the salary paid to directors in Malaya as compared to a Tamil film director those days?

Ramanathan : Here, on full contract, probably a director on an average would get about Rs 10,000.

Randor Guy : Those days only 10,000! But it must have meant a lot of money.

Ramanathan : Yes. But there we got 1000 dollars straight away, plus a bonus, plus a house and I bought my own car, they gave me an advance for that.

Randor Guy : How much was a 1000 dollar?

Ramanathan : At that time, it was about Rs1500. Then they increased the bonus, salary...

Randor Guy : Per month?

Ramanathan : Per month. It went on like that. I did about 2 to 4 films a year. Then we had some *Tambram* also who came from here.

Randor Guy : Like?

Ramanathan : One R C Purushottam who was assistant to Sintapur who was in Gemini...

Randor Guy : Kannada... T S Sintapur...

Ramanathan : Then one C Ramachandran, a very good cameraman who worked in 3 or 4 films for me. He's here in Madras. Ramachandra Menon, I think they call him. One Paramesh also came there. Later on, he left and joined Films Division, Madras.

03:26:42-03:29:37

Randor Guy : When did you return to Madras?

Ramanathan : I came back in 1957.

Randor Guy : 1957... after that what happened in India? Were you connected with our own films? How did you pick up the pieces of threads that you had left behind?

Ramanathan : I was very keen on re-joining the Tamil film industry even earlier. I came here on a short visit in 1952 trying to re- enter Tamil films, because in Singapore I felt then I was at a stagnation point, I could expect no further development. I visited all the studios, met several people, old friends of mine but couldn't succeed. I went back. I sent my wife back in 1956, I wanted stay on for a year and then return to India. I sent her here wanting to gather some knowledge about what was happening in the south Indian film industry. She had lots of friends whom she used to visit...she said that things seemed to be alright but that I could stay there for a year and then come. When I was here earlier, TKS Brothers had already booked me and V S Narayanan to direct a film for them.

Randor Guy : TKS Brothers- T K Shanmugam and T K Bhagavati...the drama troupe.

Ramanathan : And T K Muthuswamy, one of the brothers was a very close friend of mine. Sankaran was the eldest, then Muthuswamy, Shanmugam and then Bhagavati. Muthuswamy and the whole troupe came to Singapore while I was there and they performed a play under a contract with Mohammad, a famous diamond merchant. I used to visit him; I knew them as they had already booked me once along with V S Narayanan.

Randor Guy : What was the theme?

Ramanathan : *Mullil Roja* by Pa Neelakantan, they had already staged it as a play. They wanted me and V S Narayanan to direct it.

Randor Guy : When was this?

Ramanathan : This was around 1947, 48.

Randor Guy : But it didn't come through?

Ramanathan : No, it didn't. There was something happening within the company.

Randor Guy : So, they never started it?

Ramanathan : No. Not at all. They gave us some advance...

Randor Guy : Where's Narayanan now? Bhanumathi's sister's husband...

Ramanathan : Yes. I saw him once at All India Radio. He said he had come with somebody who wanted to...

Randor Guy : He is not active? Was he an editor?

Ramanathan : He was an editor and director. He wasn't very successful.

03:29:38-03:42:30

Randor Guy : You were saying that when you came back, you met TKS Brothers...

Ramanathan : No no, when I was in Singapore, they had come there to stage a play.

Randor Guy : You said that.

Ramanathan : *Raja Raja Cholan* and all that. I met Muthuswamy and conveyed that I was very keen

on returning to Madras and that I was wondering if I would get opportunities to direct films in Madras. He said that was a good thing as he was thinking of producing a film, and that since there was a chance earlier for me to direct a film, he'd like to continue with that and work on that when he went back. He gave me lot of encouragement. That was one hope I had. When I returned, he had started writing *Gumastavin Penn*.

Randor Guy : It was a successful film of the early 40s.

Ramanathan : He wanted to remake it. And Muthuswamy was eager that I should direct it as he had seen me direct in Singapore and was quite pleased. He wanted to do a new version of *Gumastavin Penn*. And he said he'd like the famous director Sridhar who was writing plays for them...

Randor Guy : Like *Bandha Paasam*...

Ramanathan : That he'd like Sridhar to write the story and script and dialogues. I said it was a good idea. He tried to contact Sridhar, but unfortunately for me probably, Sridhar was trying to start films of his own.

Randor Guy : He directed *Kalyana Parisu*.

Ramanathan : Earlier than that. What was that Sivaji Ganesan's picture...Iron Mask?

Randor Guy : *Uthama Putran*. That was directed by T Prakash Rao. But he wrote the script.

Ramanathan : He was keen on working on those lines. And keen on directing films himself. So that idea was stopped. Then I went around seeing Lena Chettiar and other people I knew. I wasn't successful until one day W R Subbarao...

Randor Guy : Cameraman?

Ramanathan : Cameraman. He visited my place and said, 'We've already formed a company called Padma Films'.

Randor Guy : Suleman?

Ramanathan : "Suleman, Padmanabhan and me... we are starting a film *Manamulla Maruthaaram*...actually we have already started and it's partly directed by A P Nagarajan, but A P Nagarajan being busy, says he can't continue. So, you please come along, both you and I will

jointly direct this film, what do you say?' I said, 'OK, well and good!'. All I wanted to was to get a foot in. I said 'ok' and the terms were agreed upon and I started working on that. When I saw the film, it was a version of the Hindi film with Kishore Kumar and somebody and I don't remember the title... it was a Hindi film. It was projected and again we saw it; myself, M Karunanidhi...

Randor Guy : Famous Chief Minister.

Ramanathan : Yes, because his nephew Murasoli Maran was to write the dialogues.

Randor Guy : Murasoli Maran?

Ramanathan : Yes, and supervised by M Karunanidhi. Thangavelu was booked for the film, he too was in the audience.

Randor Guy : The comedian.

Ramanathan : Then Balaji was the hero... full hero because he had done *Paanai Pidiththaval Bhagyasali* in which he was the hero but T S Durairaj dominated. Here he was given the role as hero and there was Sarojadevi a full-length heroine in Tamil.

Randor Guy : B Sarojadevi.

Ramanathan : We saw the whole thing and we started writing and we got the script ready and started shooting. Balaji was quite jovial and he took a lot of trouble to get his name. Sarojadevi had some difficulty with the language because the Kannada accent was there and I had to tell her to stick to the Tamil diction as much as she could. It took her a long time to get her to say, 'You've used *vallina* "ra" in place of *idaiyina* "ra."' It went on and on.

Randor Guy : We have many such instances in Tamil, with different stresses on letters 'la', 'na' and such. (Laughs)

Ramanathan : (laughs)

Randor Guy : Where was this *Manamulla Maruthaaram* shot?

Ramanathan : At Bharani Studios.

Randor Guy : Bhanumathi's. So Murasoli Maran wrote the dialogues. What was the subject?

Ramanathan : Actually, the main role was the one played by K A Thangavelu in that picture.

Randor Guy : The comedian's...

Ramanathan : He was a rag-picker who'd pick up all the rubbish and make a lot of money and is a miser too. He has a sister whom the boy falls in love with but he discourages it, leading to lot of confusion. The hero Balaji is already married and has a child.

Randor Guy : Hence the title '*Maruthaaram*', second wife.

Ramanathan : Then Sarojadevi comes, they fall in love and the first wife gets burnt in a fire accident and they fall in love and the usual story happens.

Randor Guy : How did it fare at the box office?

Ramanathan : It was a very cheap, economical production.

Randor Guy : How did Suleman come into this? I think he was a representative at Modern theatres.

Ramanathan : He was on the production side at Modern Theatres. He, Subbarao and Padmanabhan joined together.

Randor Guy : I knew about this Padma films through Mukta Srinivasan. They were all good friends, worked together in Salem.

Ramanathan : While I was directing *Manamulla Maruthaaram*, A T Annamalai who was production executive with B R Pantulu in *Kattabomman*, *Sabhash Meena*, wanted to start a picture of his own, *Kalaimagal Pictures*.

Randor Guy : Kalaimagal Pictures owned by Annamalai.

Ramanathan : At Raja Padhar street. He had already booked T R Mahalingam, Mayavathy, S V Sahasranamam, Jaavar Seetharaman, Kannaamba and he said I must direct that film for him.

Randor Guy : What was the title of the film?

Ramanathan : *Kanavu Baliththadhamma*.

Randor Guy : 'Dreams come true'.

Ramanathan : But it didn't come true. (laughs)

Randor Guy : (laughs) What went wrong?

Ramanathan : I worked very hard in that film actually, tried to improve on so many situations.

Randor Guy : Who wrote it?

Ramanathan : Several people wrote.

Randor Guy : Who was credited with it?

Ramanathan : Finally, Jaavar Seetharaman.

Randor Guy : I see, but he didn't do it at the early stages.

Ramanathan : Later on he came in and of course he did a lot of work to improve on it.

Randor Guy : Did you know Jaavar Seetharaman earlier?

Ramanathan : I had met him once or twice earlier when Ramnath was in Coimbatore. He had come once or twice. But here he worked in this film.

Randor Guy : Acting and he also did writing.

Ramanathan : Yes, *Kalathoor Kannamma* and so on.

Randor Guy : He was a well-known writer.

Ramanathan : A very good writer. Later we became good friends,

Randor Guy : I knew him at the fag end of his life. You know, he died suddenly while directing a Hindi film.

Ramanathan : Unfortunately, yes. That went on. Money had to be got from several financiers in stages, he had to borrow money, some part of the money was probably mis spent... finally the film did not reach the screen.

Randor Guy : How many reels had you shot probably?

Ramanathan : The whole picture. I had also acted in that film.

Randor Guy : What was the role?

Ramanathan : I was the CID man.

Randor Guy : What kind of a story was *Kanavu Baliththadhamma*?

Ramanathan : Well, it was a concoction of several ideas.

Randor Guy : What was the basic story line?

Ramanathan : There are two sisters, twin sisters actually. One is (inaudible), the other is in an ordinary social family.

Randor Guy : They get interchanged?

Ramanathan : Finally, (inaudible) falls in love with both of them.

Randor Guy : Quite predictable.

Ramanathan : *Kazhai koothaadi* and all that, you know.

Randor Guy : Where was this shot?

Ramanathan : At Bharani Studios and Majestic. Mainly at majestic.

Randor Guy : Who was the cameraman?

Ramanathan : We started off with Ramamurthy.

Randor Guy : V Ramamurthy?

Ramanathan : We started off with him. Later on, he said he had several engagements and he said 'No I'm Sorry, I'll give you another cameraman, Bhaskar'. Bhaskar who was assistant to Marcus Bartley.

Randor Guy : Bhaskar?

Ramanathan : Yes. Later he left and joined Films Division. He worked on this. Was a bit slow, I had difficulty in hurrying him up and so on. He was a very good cameraman, quite good.

Randor Guy : How was T R Mahalingam in it? How was your first acquaintance with him? You had already worked with him in *Pavalakkodi*...

Ramanathan : But I got to know him more intimately here. Was a very jovial and good friend. He'll always be cracking all kinds of jokes. (laughs)

Randor Guy : White, blue and red...(laughs), supposed to be a very lively man.

Ramanathan : Very lively.

Randor Guy : I knew him but not so well.

Ramanathan : Very nice friend.

Randor Guy : Number of songs naturally, with T R Mahalingam in...?

Ramanathan : Several songs...

Randor Guy : Who was your music director?

Ramanathan : T V Lingappa.

Randor Guy : Kannada?

Ramanathan : Yes. The lyrics were written by several people like Suradha, Ku Ma Balasubramaniam and another actor I forget the name...several people...

Randor Guy : Actor?

Ramanathan : Yes, he was also an actor...

Randor Guy : Saddam?

Ramanathan : Yes, Saddam.

Randor Guy : He's a good friend of mine. He's now retired and heads a village co-operative bank as Chairman. That's MGR's gift for Santhanam. I met him at a wedding and he said, 'I'm now a bank official, what do you think? (laughs) 'I'm receiving loan applications Randor Guy, I'm seeing files instead of dialogue sheets, I'm the Bank chairman! What do you think?'. 'Stay there Sir, and do sanction me loans if I need!', I said.

Ramanathan : He was a commanding type.

Randor Guy : Very nice and humorous man... So, that was the story of *Kanavu Balithadhamma*.

Ramanathan : Yes, but was not released. So, after that I naturally gave up this Tamil films.

Randor Guy : You were disgusted. When was this, 59 or 60?

Ramanathan : It went on till about 62.

Randor Guy : Such a long time they were hanging onto it?

Ramanathan : In bits and pieces. There would be a long gap and they'd start again and so on and I had to give up.

03:42:31-03:44:48

Randor Guy : After that what happened?

Ramanathan : I did some documentaries independently for other people. Like there was this very famous Circus Wild Animal trainer called Damoo Dhotre who had worked on *The Greatest Show on Earth*. I knew him because I was doing a research on circus. I went along with this Gemini Circus from Madras onwards on their trip to Bombay, I had to do my work on the circus. In Pune where Damoo Dhotre was living, he had a mansion called Circus Villa. He was a Maharashtrian who had no basic education, but he went and stayed in America and spoke with an American accent and was very good in speeches. But written English wasn't alright.

Randor Guy : You made a documentary on...

Ramanathan : On him, with all his paraphernalia.

Randor Guy : What was it called?

Ramanathan : *Damoo Dhotre*

Randor Guy : And how long was it?

Ramanathan : It was about 20 minutes.

Randor Guy : Colour or B&W?

Ramanathan : B&W.

Randor Guy : When was this made?

Ramanathan : 1964. It was not shown here. It was sent to the United States. There's a Circus World Museum in Wisconsin. It's being kept there.

Randor Guy : Do you have a print of it anywhere?

Ramanathan : No, I haven't.

Randor Guy : Where is he now?

Ramanathan : He is no more. He passed away soon after that. Then he asked me to write his biography. I had worked on that, we used to correspond. I still have that script of three volumes with me. I stayed with him in Pune and he used to narrate about his stay in USA. He was very familiar with people like Sabu...

Randor Guy : The elephant boy!

Ramanathan : He had some asthmatic trouble and he came back. He had an American wife there, divorced her and came away. Later on, married a Marathi lady and had a son. The son died in an accident. Damoo Dhotre too died, his wife is still there in Pune.

03:44:49-03:53:50

Randor Guy : You were mentioning about the directorial touches of Ellis R Dungan and you wanted to say something. Can you explain and elaborate it?

Ramanathan : He was a director who had a sound knowledge of every aspect of film craft. Even make-up.

Randor Guy : He was supposed to be good at make-up?

Ramanathan : He was very good at make-up and photography. He was a good cameraman...highly talented and versatile. Very good at adapting stories. Especially about make-up, I recall...I'm sure you too will... you remember M S Subbalakshmi...when she acted in *Seva Sadanam* by K Subramanyam, her first film with M G Natesa Iyer directed by K Subramanyam, she was introduced into films. only because she was a good singer. If you recollect her appearance there, you would find she was very skinny.

Randor Guy : She was presented very badly.

Ramanathan : Very badly presented, her hair was disheveled and so on. The attempt was very unimpressive. But people didn't mind that because of her voice and singing presentation. Now when you look into *Shakuntalai*, which Ellis R Dungan directed, he spent a lot of time with regard to her make-up, changing her face into a beauty.

Randor Guy : She looked very attractive.

Ramanathan : Her face and personality were completely different. She really was like how a star should be. And of course, the other talents too came in. He concentrated a lot on the make-up in

Shakuntala. Again, where I saw this interest of Mr. Dungan in make-up was with Selvathur Sama...

Randor Guy : Serugalathur Sama, the famous character actor.

Ramanathan : Yes, who in *Ambikapathy*, where Thyagaraja Bhagavathar and Santhanalakshmi acted...

Randor Guy : What role did Serugalathur Sama play in that?

Ramanathan : He played the role of Kamar, the father of Ambikapathy. Regarding his role, I remember Dungan saying, 'In presenting Serugalathur Sama as Kamar, I thought of some person the people would regard in high esteem, but nobody could give me a good idea. I then thought if I could make Serugalathur Sama's appearance like Rabindranath Tagore...'

Randor Guy : With long hair and beard...

Ramanathan : Yes, "I felt that would really create an impression of high, majestic esteem". And he worked very hard and I agreed with him, everybody agreed with him.

Randor Guy : Sama was more or less modelled on Rabindranath Tagore with flowing beard.

Ramanathan : Yes, majestic. And as for performance, he was a very good actor. So that's another aspect of Ellis R Dungan that can't be forgotten. He'd concentrate a lot on finding new stories, new approaches to stories. In fact, he gave me a script on Somerset Maugham's *Razor's Edge*.

Randor Guy : I see, don't think he made it.

Ramanathan : He was interested in it, he asked me to read it and wanted my opinion about it.

Randor Guy : What happened to that project?

Ramanathan : It didn't work, as there were several other projects that he wanted to do. He even wanted to do a movie of the Tagore story *The Wreck*.

Randor Guy : It has been made and re-made many times...*Noukadubi*.

Ramanathan : But he didn't do it. Then he had another script called *The Returning Soldier*. I didn't know where it was from, but he had that script. He wanted T S Balaiah to enact the leading role, because he knew Balaiah right from those days...

Randor Guy : Sorry to interrupt you, there is a Tamil film called '*Soldier's Return*' based on a novel I

believe, by G W M Reynolds. This was in the late 30s, maybe 1938,39. Let me translate the title - *Thirumbi Vandha Sepoy*. I was told, it was based on Reynolds. I don't know if he directed it. I am unable to get the details.

Ramanathan : 39? No. He gave me the script roundabout 1946,47.

Randor Guy : That was much earlier, must have been a different story. Talking of interest in presenting M S Subbulakshmi, Mastan told me that during the making of *Meera*, where MS played Meera and Dungan directed, he used to take so many test shots in different angles of only close-ups of M S Subbulakshmi, with different exposures, lenses, filters and diffusers and go on studying the results. And I believe Jithan imbibed this practice from Dungan. They used to shoot a particular sequence or take a bit of the rush, about a foot here, a few frames there, snip them into individual frames, see them on a steam projector and go on studying what's the lighting, where's the shade, where's the light, what's the effect of this light and shade...with a glass of whiskey in his hand for hours and hours. He said this was the involvement the cameraman had those days, even though the picture was not his. That was Jithan and I believe he learnt it from Dungan. Recently the Hindi version of *Meera* was telecast on Doordharshan on a late-night show. I found that M S Subbulakshmi looked very beautiful in that, especially close-ups. I mentioned this to Mastan when I did a similar programme with Mastan sometime ago and he said this was the result of all the work then. "In 1988, you are sitting comfortably in your arm chair or whatever you sat on and watched on colour TV the B&W close-ups of this lady and she looks so beautiful- all this was done at such great length with glasses of whiskey of course, in 1940s! You see it 40 years later and you, a technician go into raptures about this lady's close-ups! This was all the result of the hard work we did, my boy!" he said.

Ramanathan : Certainly.

Randor Guy : I thought I should mention this.

Ramanathan : That was an improvement after *Shakuntala*. From *Seva Sadanam*, such a change in *Shakuntala* and from *Shakuntala*, she became still more glamorous in *Meera*.

Randor Guy : Especially, I don't know whether you remember *Meera*, he said, "There's one sequence in *Meera* which is built into a song when Bala (Baby) Meera becomes the elderly Meera- he has used the familiar gimmick of a lamp's flame becoming bigger and bigger, a series of lap-dissolves and suddenly you see M S Subbulakshmi continuing the song that was sung earlier by her

step daughter Radha and in that she looks very beautiful. Do you know how many experiments we all made?” Dungan, Jithan and Mastan was an assistant at that time; trying to use different types of low angle shot of M S Subbulakshmi, he said “So many shots of her were taken but only parts of it were used, bit here and bit there, nicely edited and that’s the result you saw. In ’88 you are telling me that you saw it a few weeks back on TV and I can see your eyes were lighting up. We did all this at that time and we took “*Nandabala Manala...*”

Ramanathan : Yes, *Nandabala...*

Randor Guy : ‘*Murali...*’ (sings) suddenly her voice changes in a beautiful inspiring moment... these things don’t happen by chance.

Ramanathan : No, no, very thrilling, great precedent...

Randor Guy : Very hard work and a precedent, a hallmark that was Dungan.

Ramanathan : That was Dungan, his film, his work will speak for him.

03:53:51-03:57:50

Randor Guy : You told me that after your career here when you came back, you had a stint with Modern Theatres. When was it?

Ramanathan : This was sometime around 1962.

Randor Guy : After *Kanavu Balthadhamma?*

Ramanathan : After that.

Randor Guy : How did that come about?

Ramanathan : That came about because, I had seen T R Sundaram in between at his residence in T Nagar and I had expressed that I would like to join him at Salem and that I’d like to direct one of his feature films. He said he knew about me and would keep me in mind. I told him about Dungan and he said he knew all about me, will let me know later. And I was surprised to get a letter once from Modern Theatres, from T R Sundaram asking me to meet him at Hotel Ashoka in Egmore. I met him and he asked, ‘How would you like to come and work with me? You had said you wanted to join my studios. Are you free?’. I said, ‘I’m only too happy and I’m free’. ‘Can you come over to Salem?’ ‘Yes’. ‘You’ll have to be a production executive, not director’ ‘I thought you’d give me a

chance to direct'. 'Everybody can be a director, but being a production executive is different. He controls the whole show'. (inaudible) I said, 'Alright, very well, I'll take it up'. I took it up as a challenge and joined him. He was not as active as he used to be earlier.

Randor Guy : Not that healthy?

Ramanathan : Not healthy. He had some heart trouble and so on. He just used to supervise and have a watch over things. He would discuss things and gave me quite some regard.

Randor Guy : But what was the film made by you as the production executive?

Ramanathan : *Konjum Kumari*.

Randor Guy : Manorama was the heroine. It ran successfully.

Ramanathan : Yes, but it was a budget film.

Randor Guy : Manohar as the hero?

Ramanathan : Yes. S V Ramdas and so many others...

Randor Guy : Was it some kind of an action movie?

Ramanathan : It was a costume picture. It was an adaptation of some American film; I can't remember what that film was. Some Robert Taylor film. Copy to copy. (laughs)

Randor Guy : They are doing it all the time.

Ramanathan : It was done fairly quickly, directed by one G Viswanathan who's now no more. That was on film. And after that we started another project which we had discussed earlier.

Randor Guy : What was that?

Ramanathan : A film called *Chitrangi*.

Randor Guy : With A V M Rajan and Pushpalatha.

Ramanathan : But before we could complete it, T R Sundaram passed away. But we had to continue with *Chitrangi*.

Randor Guy : Who directed *Chitrangi*?

Ramanathan : R S Mani.

Randor Guy : Your old Guru, he came there?

Ramanathan : He came and directed the film. Probably he thought of his old days and I said, 'Well and good, you better direct the picture'. I was the production executive and he was the director and I could command him. I said, 'Carry on, you are a good director'. He did it but it wasn't successful.

Randor Guy : It was a costume drama?

Ramanathan : Yes, and not successful.

03:57:51-03:59:54

Randor Guy : Modern theatres...how many floors did they have?

Ramanathan : Three floors.

Randor Guy : Was it a well- equipped studio?

Ramanathan : Oh, very well equipped.

Randor Guy : They had their own lab...

Ramanathan : They had their own very good camera equipment, there was one man maintaining those camera accessories and equipments.

Randor Guy : By the way, talking of these studios in district towns like Coimbatore, Salem, what were they doing for these orchestra players for recording and re-recording purposes? Were they able to get orchestra players like violinists, drummers, people playing piano or trumpets...because most of them were centred in Madras?

Ramanathan : You are referring to people in Madras, but those days in Coimbatore Central studios, they had a music department and S M Subbaiah Naidu was in charge of that.

Randor Guy : He was the music director.

Ramanathan : No, at that time he was not so famous a music director, he was only directing music for certain films but they used to get people from Madras like S V Venkatraman, G Ramanathan, C R Subbaraman and others as music directors. For the orchestra too, they had a very strong list.

Randor Guy : That was the interview with Mr. S Ramanathan, 69. Though retired from active film making, he continues to be active and busy with his writing and lecturing.