



# National Film Archive of India

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting  
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## Interview of Producer, Director and Technician T. Janakiram in Tamil Cinema by Randor Guy

00:00:01-00:08:25

This is Randor Guy interviewing Mr. T Janakiram, one of the senior most technicians of South Indian Cinema. Mr Janakiram is a producer, director and an all-round technician and one of the speakers of the Tamil film industry for many years. He entered cinema as early as 1934 and has continued to be active for nearly 50 years, when he gave up for reasons due to ill health. He has made films in Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and also Hindi and Sinhalese too. This interview with Mr. Janakiram, the first one, takes place at his residence in Kodambakkam, Madras on the afternoon of Friday February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1991. Mr. Janakiram speaks in English as well as Tamil.

**Randor Guy :** Good afternoon to you Sir, it's nice to see you after sometime and I'm very happy to see you active and mentally agile despite your ill health and I'm very grateful to you for agreeing to talk to me on tape for this interview with the National Film Archive of India. As explained to you, this is a project called Oral Film History where we go to the original sources, to talk to senior technicians, actresses, actors, writers, the entire discipline. And we have come to you and I think you are the senior

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most technician today who's still able to remember, in full possession of your wits and I must express my gratitude and thankfulness on my behalf and on behalf of MR. P K Nair, the director of Film Archive, for agreeing to talk to me. We will start off from...

**Randor Guy :** How did you get into cinema? You come from Bangalore. Can you tell something about your background?

**Janakiram :** I was essentially a photographer, trained by G K Vale.

**Randor Guy :** GK Vale, the famous photographer?

**Janakiram :** Exactly. But I was having my own photo shop also.

**Randor Guy :** Where?

**Janakiram :** In Bangalore. In those times I was called the 'Death Photographer' by my friends.

**Randor Guy :** 'Death Photographer', that is *Saavu* Photographer? Because you were mostly taking funerals...?

**Janakiram :** The reason was, people those days believed having photos taken, reduced one's life; so the photo will be taken only after they died. I was making a small test piece of the enlargement for that and it was lying on my table, I was just staring at it. It's highly true that photography is only two dimensional. So, it can anyway (inaudible). I took a blade, broke it and it became a pointed thing. (Inaudible) it became like an eyeball. I put a little Indian Ink and it looked as if he was alive. A couple of my friends were there and they were praising me. Two rupees for three cabinet-size photos those days and the lady for whom we took the photographs, was amazed at how life-like it looked and wished to know how much it would cost for

such an effect! I wasn't good in business. My friends who were around bragged it'd cost five rupees! She paid up immediately! From then on, wherever there was a death, I'd be called and I'd do it.

**Randor Guy :** (laughs) That's why you were called the 'Death Photographer'!

**Janakiram :** That's how I started! Once the family barber of someone died and they took me. Though I had several plates with me, I asked for an advance of two rupees to buy the plate.

**Randor Guy :** Those days you had plates, glass plates...

**Janakiram :** Glass plates. She gave me the bus fare to go to the funeral house too, which was some 20 miles away from Bangalore. I obliged and went there. I have the habit of observing people generally, whether in a wedding or funeral... observe whose crying is genuine and whose fake... I used to come home and imitate. And there, as I was waiting, a sudden quarrel broke out. It's customary to cover the dead body with a cloth and that cloth would have cost some six annas those days. The quarrel was over who should pay for that cloth!

**Randor Guy :** They were quarreling over that!

**Janakiram :** And they quarreled also over the cost of four annas for the plank of two bamboo sticks and a bundle of hay! And I wondered, with such families around, no matter how much I charged and got, not a pie would remain with me. I insisted on my return fare too and came home. The next morning, I got ready to eat my four- course meal brought from home... I belong to the Mudaliyar family where the food is elaborate with several side dishes and non-vegetarian fare... but the previous day's petty quarrel over four and eight annas was playing like a flash-back on my mind and

I just could not eat. I returned the food and went out to the cinema hall to distract my mood. The cinema was close to my house and the film was *Sunhera Sansar*.

**Randor Guy :** Where was this place?

**Janakiram :** In Bangalore Cantonment. There was a theatre called Palace Talkies. I went and saw the picture, a Hindi film directed by Devaki Bose.

**Randor Guy :** A talkie film of early days?

**Janakiram :** The picture was very engrossing. The film got over and the people left but I was still seated there, looking at the screen. The theatre manager was a relative, who came in to check if anybody had left their purse or belongings and seeing me still seated, asked, “Babu (I was called Babu at home)! Have you fallen asleep?”. Nodding, I left and went to a hotel and sat in a corner contemplating on my next move. For making films, photography is very important and it’s called cinematography and decided I should pursue that. I went to ask permission of my maternal uncle who was my Godfather, V S Loganatha Mudaliar.

**Randor Guy :** V S Loganatha Mudaliar? In Bangalore?

**Janakiram :** The leading Chemist and Druggist V L Nathan and Co, in Bangalore. I went and asked him. But he was not moved at all even after an hour and a half of my crying and pleading. I insisted I had to go. Then he declared if I indeed left, we both could consider each other dead from then on!

**Randor Guy :** He disowned you! Because you were joining films?

**Janakiram :** My parents were in Delhi, my father was working in BB&CI Railway there.

**Randor Guy :** Bombay Baroda and Central Indian Railway.

**Janakiram** : He was everything for me... Respected him more than God... In my young spirit, I took forty rupees and got out. My grandmother and my aunt called out to him to stop me from going away. But he challenged that even if I went away then, I'd return to him like a dog. But I too, in my spirit of youth, stood on the road and swore that I'd rather die than ever come to him for money! Declaring so, I walked off. By God's Grace, till date, I never had to stretch my hands out to anybody. Thanks to his blessing... though he uttered all those things, he got me married to his daughter.

**Randor Guy** : You married his daughter!

**Janakiram** : I'm the rightful man to marry the maternal uncle's daughter.

**Randor Guy** : Yes, *murai penn*.

**Janakiram** : But number of enquiries because I was in films... whether I drink or smoke...

**Randor Guy** : (laughs).

**Janakiram** : Fortunately, God was with me. Till today I have not... on the third day of joining films, I gave up coffee. I could not afford it as my salary was ten rupees.

00:08:26-00:12:23

**Randor Guy** : You came to Madras with that money?

**Janakiram** : Just before that I had a little adventure. In Bangalore there was a silent film company called Surya Films.

**Randor Guy** : Yes I know.

**Janakiram** : Haribhai Desai and... Shah. I went there because my uncle was their doctor. Things were not quite happy there, I left and joined Mysore Film Studio. That was Thimmayya.

**Randor Guy :** Thimmayya, Malleswaram?

**Janakiram :** Mm, near Malleswaram.

**Randor Guy :** Were they making films there?

**Janakiram :** Yes, *Rajasuya Yaga*.

**Randor Guy :** Kannada silent film. Do you remember who made it?

**Janakiram :** Thimmayya himself. I forget the lady artist's name.

**Randor Guy :** Lakshmibai?

**Janakiram :** No, Padmavathy?

**Randor Guy :** In Surya Films, there were two sisters, Lakshmibai and Kamalabai.

They were stunt artists. Baby Kamala.

**Janakiram :** She was one and then Lakshmi. Who was married to Subbiah Naidu.

**Randor Guy :** I know.

**Janakiram :** I know them very well. The technique was not good and things were not so good, I could see...

**Randor Guy :** That *Rajasuya Yaga* was the only silent film made there.

**Janakiram :** S V Iyer or some such...

**Randor Guy :** K V Iyer.

**Janakiram :** K V Iyer was the physical trainer, his brother was the one. He was the hero. The picture was a total failure.

**Randor Guy :** It was released? Because in the silent films list that I have, there are number of films made by Surya Films Company, like *Gubbi Veeranna*, *His Love Affairs*, *Kallara Koottaa* and a few others. But there's no mention of this *Rajasuya Yaga* anywhere.

**Janakiram** : *Rajasuya Yaga* was produced by Thimmayya.

**Randor Guy** : Why I'm asking this is because I'm now doing a book on South Indian Cinema which I told you, for the Film Chamber of Commerce, in which I'm dealing with this silent period also. And I propose to do a book on Silent Cinema in South India later. Will be a more detailed... that's why I'm asking for such details; because when I went to Bangalore for research, I heard about this Thimmayya studio at Malleswaram, they were not able to tell me about this *Rajasuya Yaga*. You worked in *Rajasuya Yaga*?

**Janakiram** : There was a heroine who was from Tamil field. Paappaa...she was a flutist. Mayavaram Paappaa!

**Randor Guy** : Mayavaram Paappaa who used to play the flute.

**Janakiram** : She acted in that. She later became the wife of Kothamangalam Seenu.

**Randor Guy** : Yeah, that's right.

**Janakiram** : I don't think she's there with him.

**Randor Guy** : No, I don't think so. But Kothamangalam Seenu is there. Who was this Thimmayya? Was he a film man?

**Janakiram** : There was one concern called V R Brothers. They were essentially engineers. Mechanical gadgets. They were the first in India to manufacture the (inaudible) projector. Until then it had to be imported. They were making almost all parts of that projector.

**Randor Guy** : In Bangalore?

**Janakiram** : in Bangalore, V R Brothers is the name, Central Street.

**Randor Guy** : I know Central Street. This man was connected with that?

**Janakiram** : He was the proprietor. His younger brother Venugopal was my classmate. I used to go there.

00:12:24-00:13:02

**Randor Guy** : After *Rajasuya Yaga*...this was probably '30,'31?

**Janakiram** : '32, '33. Surya Films was '30. Towards the end of '30, there was Janabai a Hindi artist was working there. Then one Bakre and Master Vittal the stunt man were there.

**Randor Guy** : I believe Sundar Rao Nadkarni was also there.

**Janakiram** : He was a cameraman, then became...

**Randor Guy** : A director.

**Janakiram** : A salesman and then...

**Randor Guy** : He came to Sundaram Sound Studios.

**Janakiram** : He was a brilliant man.

00:13:03-00:17:42

**Randor Guy** : And after these adventures in silent cinema, where you've given this new information about Thimmaiya for which I must thank you, you came down to Madras?

**Janakiram** : 1934 is correct. All these adventures before '34. '30 to '34 I was there but that didn't work for me, so I...

**Randor Guy** : I know, because this is history, we are recording history.

**Janakiram** : Then I just used to go and wait at the gate of Vale Pictures.

**Randor Guy** : Where was Vale Pictures at that time? Eldams Road?

**Janakiram** : Eldams Road proper.

Randor Guy: Now you came to Vale Pictures in Madras.

**Janakiram** : I was trying to find my feet and was waiting at the gate of Vale Pictures.

Randor Guy: This was at Maharaja of Peethapuram Bungalow on Eldams Road?

**Janakiram** : I needed to go past the sentry and in order to make an impression, I used to wear a suit and go and wait. But he would not let me in and I was very shy. One day I was returning home with the knowledge that I had just an anna and a half on me. Boarding a bus, I asked the conductor to give me a ticket that'd carry me a distance and he gave me a ticket up to Thousand Lights. One Mr. P T Paani Iyer was seated in the bus.

Randor Guy: He was seated with you?

**Janakiram** : He was already in the bus. Seeing the *Chandan Tikka* on my forehead he enquired if I was a Mudaliar and I answered 'yes'. He further enquired about my residence, name and other details. I showed him the two photographs that I had carried to show the Studio that I could write, paint and practically work in any department. He took me home that day and the next day, he brought me back and introduced me to Mr. M T Rajan.

Randor Guy: Mr. M T Rajan who was one of the Managing Directors of Vale Pictures!

**Janakiram** : There was one Rajasigamani Mudaliar who was the Manager at Vale Pictures. And C Parthasarathy...

Randor Guy: C P Sarathy!

**Janakiram** : C P Sarathy was a very closely connected relative.

Randor Guy: Was M T Rajan related to you?

**Janakiram** : Yes.

Randor Guy: He was also related, but you didn't know him at that time?

**Janakiram** : I could have easily taken advantage, but he would have sent me back to Bangalore.

Randor Guy: You didn't want that.

**Janakiram** : So whenever he'd come to the studio, I'd go and hide behind the camera or something and come back after he left.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : Only one job was vacant, that of the Camera Painting Coolie. He wasn't coming and that was the only job available. I agreed to take that job.

Randor Guy: What was that job?

**Janakiram** : To help the Art Director mix paints.

Randor Guy: Who was the Art Director at that time?

**Janakiram** : Embar Aiyah.

Randor Guy: M Balaiya?

**Janakiram** : Embar Aiyah.

Randor Guy: He was the famous Art Director?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Raju community man. Very famous. He was working with Parsi Bhajiwala Company. You would've heard of him.

Randor Guy: Yes, I have.

**Janakiram** : On the stage many different things would happen. He was the creator of all that. He was the first man to create a set in a cinema studio or even in a drama.

Randor Guy: Embar Aiyah was the pioneer art director. He was from Andhra?

**Janakiram** : Not from Andhra. A Telugu man. Raju community are invariably artists and he belonged to that community. His elder son S V Raju in Mysore now, is a leading (inaudible).

Randor Guy: So you worked under this Embar Aiyah...

**Janakiram** : And very few people there knew English. In the entire studio, I was the only educated man. The manager used to wonder how I'd work as a coolie, wearing a suit. I assured I'd change into a *dhoti* and did so the next day. Embar took a liking to me as he was eager to know the news but could not read himself as he was not educated. So I would read to him.

00:17:43-00:19:37

Randor Guy: When you joined which film was under production in Vale Pictures?

**Janakiram** : *Thayumanavar*.

Randor Guy: Do you remember who acted in that? I can check on that.

**Janakiram** : No, there was one Raja... Maharaja... I'll tell you later. Immediately after that, *Pattinaththaar*.

Randor Guy: Which was done by Dhandapani Desikar.

**Janakiram** : Yes. How it happened was, I was there, this Dhandapani Desikar was not known to anyone. There was another man called Sundaramurthy Odhuvaar. They also produced one *Pattinaththaar*.

Randor Guy: *Lotus Pattinaththaar*.

**Janakiram** : That was also *Pattinaththaar*. Both got completed. Now these people were afraid if their film would run and wanted to sell it away. The whole cost of the production was 31,000. They were prepared to give it away for 30,000.

Randor Guy: They wanted to cut their losses.

**Janakiram** : Yes. Then Jayantilal Kaku who was one of the main partners, argued why they should sell and incur a loss of thousand rupees and why not release the film in their own theatre Broadway...

Randor Guy: In Madras...

**Janakiram** : ... and take a chance? One thousand was a great amount those days. The picture was released and ran like anything!

Randor Guy: It was a big success!

**Janakiram** : Very big success. With that money they purchased the land in Guindy. A Mitchell camera those days was three thousand rupees.

Randor Guy: Thirty thousand rupees.

Jankairam: They purchased that Mitchell camera for thirty thousand rupees. That was one of the well-equipped studios those days. They also purchased Federico Recording equipment. There was another Variable Density Recorder called Blue Seal.

Randor Guy: Blue Seal, yes.

00:19:38-00:24:57

Randor Guy: When you were in Vale Pictures on Eldams Road, who were the technicians there?

**Janakiram** : I'll tell you. Biggs was the recordist.

Randor Guy: C E Biggs who became very big in Gemini.

**Janakiram** : His first assistant was Jeeva. And then Manavalan. And another gentleman...

Randor Guy: What about Cinematography?

**Janakiram** : E R Cooper. He was one of the camera men in the London Film *Elephant Boy*.

Randor Guy: Was he an English man?

**Janakiram** : No. he was a Parsi. He took a liking for me as I was the only one he could converse with.

Randor Guy: I have a photograph of Cooper with Ellis R Dungan in a group. Was Ramnoth there at that time?

Janakiram : Ramnoth came much later. There was this Pragjothi studios...Karthikeya!

Randor Guy: Because Muthuamy Iyer once told me that...

**Janakiram** : Muthusamy Iyer, Ramnoth and Shekhar.

Randor Guy: That they were associated with Vale Pictures, during its formation.

**Janakiram** : Yes. During its formation. Immediately all three left.

Randor Guy: So when you were there, they were not there?

**Janakiram** : They were there. But I was not... I was just a coolie in the...

Randor Guy: But you had seen them in the...

**Janakiram** : I had seen them very much.

Randor Guy: Buy didn't know them at that time?

**Janakiram** : I became (inaudible) that technically they were good. When they came to Karthikeya Studios, I went and saw them stealthily.

Randor Guy: There was a sort of rivalry between studios?

**Janakiram :** Yes. Shekhar took a liking for me as he found me to be a decent boy. They assured me that as and when the studio became a *pucca* one, they'd take me in. Then I came back. By accident, I met... Vale Pictures office was closed.

Randor Guy: But Vale Pictures was not active at that time?

**Janakiram :** One picture we'd make. And till the time we make the second picture, the studio will be vacant.

Randor Guy: Nothing happens.

**Janakiram :** Yes. We all will be given salaries. Ten rupees was my salary.

Randor Guy: Per month?

**Janakiram :** One rupee was my room rent.

Randor Guy: Where were you staying?

**Janakiram :** In the studio itself. I was allowed, as I was related to .... One rupee was my room rent and with nine rupees I used to...

Randor Guy: That was quite some money!

**Janakiram :** On the salary day, everyone including the tea man will come and stay near the office. Other technicians will all have a little more to give and they'll say they'd give the next month. But I was the only man making 4 or 8 annas more than my salary. The coolies in my quarters would ask for a quarter anna or half an anna every now and then and would return it on the salary day. That's how I was managing. The third day after joining the studio, I gave up coffee.

Randor Guy: You gave up drinking coffee?

**Janakiram :** Because while cleaning the camera, I'd feel like taking the coffee to the gate to drink and some half hour would be spent on that.

Randor Guy: Half an hour for a cup of coffee!

**Janakiram** : The same day, three times I went. I remembered swearing to my uncle that I would rather die than return to him for help and realized that I had just spent an anna and a half on coffee. So I decided to cut it. During shootings it'll be served free and I could then have it.

Randor Guy: ( laughs) You were economizing.

**Janakiram** : Then actually we were having, you won't believe, six rupees for a carrier meal.

Randor Guy: For a carrier meal per month?

**Janakiram** : There was one Ratnam and one Balu...

Randor Guy: Balu who became a good art director?

**Janakiram** : Embar Ayyah's assistant and me... we three jointly used to share one carrier meal.

Randor Guy: At six rupees per month?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Then, my share was just two rupees. I realized then that, the man who made that food must be making four *anaas* profit; why not start to cook my own food? Then I met A K Appara Mudaliar my relative and they tried to dissuade me from doing so. I did not like it. But somehow I told them if at all they wanted, they should just clean up things and give me but never expect me to come and take food from their house. They obliged. The entire month's provision including the beer bottle...you know the tall bottle...three anaas that was called half a *vees*. And one *vees* of wheat was three *anaas*.

Randor Guy: That was about 18 paise.

**Janakiram :** Then there was American flour, maida which was three *anaas*. One *vees* means three pounds and two ounces. Few things I'll put in a Kodak box and keep for the entire month. And eight and a half measures- *padi*- rice, Nellore rice for one rupee. Absolutely clean, no adulteration. This would suffice for an entire month. One cigarette tin measure I used to cook every day. And four and a half measures of milk for one rupee. *Chatak* as they called, *uzhakku* means *kaal padi*. So every day, *chatak*. Only on Saturdays, I'd invite all my friends and make *dosa* and give them. That's how I became popular among every one and learnt cooking also.

00:24:58-00:28:26

Randor Guy: After working for Embar Ayyah in the art department, what was your next step?

**Janakiram :** My main aim was to learn Cinematography. But there was no place. I learnt that in the Camera department there was a Camera Coolie Mari who didn't turn up. He was assistant to Chavan. He was a man with no manners. I didn't like them but was forced to be with them. Then there was one Munusamy (inaudible). When the camera coolie didn't turn up, I asked Embar Aiyah to recommend me but he refused, as he didn't want me to leave him, because he didn't have anyone to read the paper to him. Then he struck a deal with me and said he'd recommend me on the condition that no matter where I went, I'd come and read the paper to him during lunchtime. Since he was the department chief, Mr. Cooper and one Mr. D G Gune...

Randor Guy: Gune...was he a Maharashtrian or...

**Janakiram :** Maharashtrian.

Randor Guy: Because he had directed some pictures.

**Janakiram** : Yes...*Panduranga*...

**Randor Guy** : Telugu?

**Janakiram** : No, Tamil. Madhuras acted.

**Randor Guy** : Madhuras acted, directed by Gune. So he was not a Sri Lankan?

**Janakiram** : Maharashtrian! From Maharashtra, he made that picture. A good man, though I can't equate him to Cooper, but still...

Randor Guy: Cooper was a good technician.

**Janakiram** : He was working for London Films.

Randor Guy: London Films...*Elephant Boy*... Alexander Korda...

**Janakiram** : He was very sportive, could not hide anything from me. Other cameramen will not show the diaphragm of the camera or the filter, won't allow us to peep in...

Randor Guy: Secret! (laughs)

**Janakiram** : One day...This Madhuras was a very beautiful Iyengar girl. Since I was new, I was staring at her. The shot was being taken. Cooper hit me on the shoulder and said, "See that bitch through the camera. You'll learn framing and also have the satisfaction of seeing her". That's how I learnt that discipline. He was like that, sportive and good. I can say without ego that I was the first man to open the Mitchell camera and clean and repair it.

Randor Guy: Here at Vale Pictures?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Then I opened the camera of Moilon. It was war time and no camera could be purchased, nor was any spare part available. Knowing my capacity, he

allowed me to open and repair it. At PRR and Sons too, they did not know the mechanism and won't take it.

Randor Guy: After Vale Pictures where did you go and how long were you with Vale Pictures? You joined in '34.

**Janakiram** : Till about... 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939 if I remember correctly, was the date war started. Immediately all the studios were closed.

Randor Guy: By that time they had moved to Guindy...

**Janakiram** : Yes. I too was living in Guindy.

00:28:27-00:32:37

Randor Guy: In Vale Pictures, which films did you work on? Do you remember the names of the films?

**Janakiram** : *Vallala Maharaja*, now I remember.

Randor Guy: That was the one with Dhandapani Desikar. What kind of a picture was *Vallala Maharaja*?

**Janakiram** : Puranic subject. If I'm not wrong, Dhandapani Desikar's wife...

Randor Guy: Devasena, whom he later married.

**Janakiram** : She was the heroine.

Randor Guy: I have an old still of *Vallala Maharaja*. I can check, I think Devasena was in the picture. But don't you remember who directed it? Two people?

**Janakiram** : Two? One was the editor who became a very good editor later.

Randor Guy: Do you remember his name?

**Janakiram** : I'm trying to recall. He was the first man to set the sound to the rhythm and join it. Some 400 to 500 feet he remove and replace and nobody could trace

where it was kept. He worked as a Chief Editor in Gemini also for long. He died in a scooter accident.

Randor Guy: Chandru!

**Janakiram** : Chandru!

Randor Guy: Chandru was in Vale Pictures?

**Janakiram** : He was a quite an intelligent man. He was one of the two directors. Who was the other director, I don't know, somebody can tell me.

Randor Guy: What were the Telugu films made by Vale Pictures? They made some Telugu pictures too.

**Janakiram** : *Krishna Leela*. Rajeshwar Rao was Krishna. That time we didn't have electric lights. Glass studio...

Randor Guy: Like R Prakash?

**Janakiram** : Ground glass they call... there will be a cloth inside to diffuse; we'll remove the cloth for a while to get the soft tone.

Randor Guy: What about Sound Recording? It was all direct optical?

**Janakiram** : Direct, carbon displacement. Very sensitive. We used to keep it in the hot sun to...and bang it to bring it to the correct position. (Inaudible) There was one more four track recording called BASF that was purchased by Gemini also. Vasani insisted on recording being done, the BASF sound would come very nicely and there were only one or two technicians...

Randor Guy: Did Vale Pictures have a lab of their own?

**Janakiram :** Rudrappa was the Chief of the lab. And ultimately he became my partner in the Navjothi studio in Mysore later. Embar Aiyah, Rudrappa, myself...nine technicians we joined and made a studio.

Randor Guy: And M T Rajan was one of the successful men in those days; he even had Vale Murugan Films for distribution.

**Janakiram :** He was only an elected MP.

Randor Guy: They have their office even now. In China Bazar, there's a huge board. 'M T Rajan Nagar'. And he wasn't actually a producer, was he?

**Janakiram :** No, not at all. But he was very timid in coming up with big finances. There was one Srinivasa Chettiar, known as Kalidas Srinivasa Chettiar because he made the picture *Kalidas*. He became a partner in that. The whole picture got produced in thirty thousand rupees and some three to five thousand he'd... but Srinivasa Chettiar was a good businessman, adventurous. For *Panduranga*, the main partner was Srinivasa Chettiar.

Randor Guy: That picture flopped I believe, people didn't like to see this lady as the heroine.

**Janakiram :** Not only that, they didn't like her separation from Krishnan.

Randor Guy: N S Krishnan...

**Janakiram :** Their first separation. It was during that time that she accepted the film.

(Inaudible) not that way. She was an Iyengar.

Randor Guy: Father was an Iyengar I think.

**Janakiram :** Yes, from Tiruvanaikkal.

Randor Guy: Near Srirangam. Mother was a Devadasi. I used to know her fairly well.

00:32:38-00:41:43

Randor Guy: After leaving Vale Pictures, where did you join?

**Janakiram** : Immediately after Vel Pictures, I went to director Subramanyam.

Randor Guy: K Subramanyam?

**Janakiram** : I had heard about him. I had heard a lot about *Seva Sadanam*, *Bala Yogini* and all that, unusual and educative. Within me, I had the craze to join Mr Subramanyam. Though there was a divide in feelings for brahmins and non-brahmins in those days, the day I went, without a second thought some how he took a liking to me. He called Krishnaiyar in charge of the canteen and told him henceforth I would have my meals there. He took me in immediately.

Randor Guy: So you joined K Subramanyam. Where was the studio at that time?

**Janakiram** : The pesent Gemini. Motion Pictures Producers Combine.

Randor Guy: He had already started it that time.

**Janakiram** : A well-equipped studio with good technicians. All from Calcutta.

Randor Guy: Sailen Bose...

**Janakiram** : Hari Babu, Kamal Ghosh...

Randor Guy: Jothi Sinha...

**Janakiram** : Jothi Sinha the recordist. He was the best recordist on those days, he was a musician himself.

Randor Guy: Oh, he was a musician, was he?

**Janakiram** : There was no good recording studio. Then Subramaniam made *Tyagabhoomi*.

Randor Guy: 1939.

**Janakiram** : For that he made a temporary set. The other two sets were occupied. He made a simple studio with coconut palms...

Randor Guy: A thatched hut.

**Janakiram** : Thatched roof. One day recording was very essential and we did it. The acoustics was so fine that it became a recording studio.

Randor Guy: I suppose the thatch absorbs the echo, the reverberation...

**Janakiram** : Even from other studios they used to come for recording there.

Randor Guy: Was it the first time it was done there?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Manavalan was one assistant, Ranga Rao was another. He later retired as Chief Recordist in Gemini.

Randor Guy: One thing I wanted to ask you- I had done a programme like this with M K Radha before he died. Some time in early 1988 or 89...He told me that before Motion Pictures Combines was started, there was a small studio in that area called Mahalakshmi Studio, conducted by one Mahadevaiyar who was a Congressman responsible for the Congress Grounds coming up; that a film called *Minor Rajamani* directed by Raja Sandow in which he acted was shot in that Mahalakshmi studio. Do you remember that?

**Janakiram** : Yes, I remember that well. Then immediately after that they produced a film called *Krishnan Thoodhu*.

Randor Guy: I think *Krishnan Thoodhu* was a little later.

**Janakiram** : No, the studio got burnt. The projector caught fire and Raja Sandow was the man who pulled out the wires and carried the projector on his shoulders and came running out.

Randor Guy: The recording theatre?

**Janakiram** : No, the projection theatre.

Randor Guy: They had a small projection theatre in the Mahalakshmi Studio?

**Janakiram** : The fire was manipulated because of enmity between the proprietors and the (Inaudible). They had very good technicians, best editor and (Inaudible). The film was burnt but Raja Chettiar had insured it.

Randor Guy: He was the one who produced it under Rajagopal Talkies.

**Janakiram** : With the insurance claim settlement, he re-started *Krishnan Thoothu*.

Randor Guy: This happened at Mahalakshmi Studio?

Janakiram : By the time the movie got re-started, it was Motion Pictures Combines...

Randor Guy: Motion Pictures Producers Combines was very active for a long time.

**Janakiram** : Active and made very good pictures. *Chandika, Raitu Bidda...*

Randor Guy: *Mala Pilla...*

**Janakiram** : Yes. Raja Chellapalli was also there. He was Managing Director for some time. And it had a very good set-up. The only thing was that there were many people to squander the money in any way. At a particular stage we could not get our salary. Artists could not get their (inaudible). There was a picture called *Kachcha Devayani*.

Randor Guy: T R Rajakumari shot into limelight in that.

**Janakiram** : No, the first picture *Kumara Kulothungan...*

Randor Guy: At Deccan Cinetone...

**Janakiram** : Dharmalinga Mudaliar, my relative.

Randor Guy: Can you tell me something about this Deccan Cinetone? I believe it was in Kilpauk, that's what Mastan told me. They made this *Kumara Kulothungan* and also made *Dhaana Soora Veera Karnan*. They shot it in Bombay.

**Janakiram** : No, it came back here. *Dhaana Soora Veera Karnan* was directed by Dwarakanath.

Randor Guy: Who was this Dwarakanath?

**Janakiram** : He was an enterprising man who was the director for that. And later without much knowledge of it, he became the Principal of Chamaraja Institute as well.

Randor Guy: In Bangalore? I see. (Laughs)

**Janakiram** : And then...

Randor Guy: Mastan said, before Newtowne Studio was started in Kilpauk in 1937, there was also a small B&W lab and a studio called Ajanta where a Telugu film called *Pramilarjuneeyam* was made in 1936, which was directed by this Dwarakanath. Is that right? Then Newtowne took over and many things happened...

**Janakiram** : Mandyam Iyengar.

Randor Guy: Who? That Dwarakanath?

**Janakiram** : You know the language they speak... mixture of Kannada and...

Randor Guy: *Enthan konkey...*

**Janakiram** : *Enthkonterey...*

Randor Guy: (laughs) That kind of Iyengar Tamil.

**Janakiram** : Then he became a self-styled recordist also.

Randor Guy: So this Deccan Cinetone was owned by Dharmalinga Mudaliar. What was he, a film man?

**Janakiram** : No. He was connected to a group of Mudaliars who were very rich and who first made the Mangalore Tiles, with a sovereign brand. They had connections in Alwaye, Kerala. They ultimately opened it here. Venugopal Mudaliar and his brother this Dharmalinga Mudaliar made enormous money in the tiles business. You must have heard about the famous Ramalinga Mudaliar case...

Randor Guy: The Ramalinga Mudaliar Will case... they are from that family?

**Janakiram** : My maternal uncle was one of the signatories in that. The children fought to prove that Ramalinga Mudaliar was not sane at that time and they had (inaudible)

Randor Guy: Yes, I had heard about that case. I believe he gave all his property to charity.

**Janakiram** : In such things, though we are Mudaliars, we are very orthodox. We won't touch anything touched by Adi Dravidas and such. But Ramalinga Mudaliar was a man who had an Adi Dravida as a butler and a cook and all that.

Randor Guy: Very westernized?

**Janakiram** : Westernised. And the IG of Police Rajaratnam was the first son-in-law of Ramalinga Mudaliar.

Randor Guy: I've heard so.

**Janakiram** : On the wedding day, once the wedding is over, there won't be any dinner or such. One just comes and leaves. On the second day, a dinner and reception will be arranged, a brand new car presented to the son -in- law for the honey moon. Those days one didn't know what a honey moon was, but he was so advanced. That time he

gave away money to his cleaner, gardener and all servants. But these people were devotees of one Padagachery Ramalinga Swamigal. They used to wash his feet and do such things which Ramalinga Mudaliar didn't like. That's why he wanted to give away all property to as many as he could. Towards the end, to the unmarried daughter he gave Rs.50,000 and to the married daughter Rs.25000.

Randor Guy: So Dharmalinga Mudaliar started Deccan Cinetone in Kilpauk in that street.

**Janakiram** : Yes, it was almost a lane. Arms Road...

Randor Guy: Yes, that's what he told me.

00:41:44-00:46:07

Randor Guy: So you came to MPPC and what was your work in MPPC?

**Janakiram** : Camera.

Randor Guy: You joined as Camera Assistant?

**Janakiram** : Subramania Iyer was very kind to talk to Bose...

Randor Guy: Sailen Bose!

**Janakiram** : Sailen Bose was the cameraman, the top cameraman of those days. I was very lucky to join him and till the end he wanted me. Because I had come to learn, I was working as an assistant to three cameramen- Sailen Bose, Kamal Ghosh and Adi Irani.

Randor Guy: Oh, Adi Irani also was in MPPC?

**Janakiram** : Three different people had three different ways of lighting and all that and I wanted to learn all that and make my own later. Because I wasn't married, my home was the camera room.

Randor Guy: I see.

Janakiram: So I used to tell them to call me if needed. Particularly for trolley shots, the focusing is very important and they would call me.

Randor Guy: Yes, 'follow focus'.

**Janakiram** : Yes, 'follow focus'. Others would make a mark with chalk and see, but by that time, things could be out of focus. But I used to guess correctly and never went wrong. After one shooting is over, I'd go in and sleep, till another set is decorated, painted and dried. When shooting begins next, I'd go and join. I would have had enough sleep by then.

Randor Guy: Now going back a little, did you know R Prakash?

Janakiram : Yes, very well.

Randor Guy: Can you tell something about him, because he was a pioneer figure.

**Janakiram** : Do you know, there were 40 cameramen who worked on the film *Ben Hur* and he was one of the forty.

Randor Guy: I believe he even worked under D W Griffith. That's what R M Krishnaswamy said.

**Janakiram** : You are right. That's how he was bold enough to come here. His brother was Chitti Babu who was managing Odeon theatre.

Randor Guy: That was many years later.

**Janakiram** : In fact, to go further back, Prakash's father Venkaiyah...

Randor Guy: Raghupathy Venkaiyah.

**Janakiram** : Venkaiyah and my father Thiruvencatasamy were the first to start Ice Cream in Madras.

Randor Guy: Your father?

**Janakiram** : He was adventurous. In Bangalore, he and G K Vale's father opened 'Beer and Billiards'. Those were British times and you would get both. On Brigade Road.

Randor Guy: Something like a salon?

**Janakiram** : G K Vale's father was Gangadhara Mudaliar and my father was Thiruvenkatasamy Mudaliar. My father had many adventures. He designed his own...in those days, the Governor's cart would have two horses and one coach. He designed one with four horses, Venkaiyah financed it and for the Governor's Cup event, they went to the race course with this. As they went in, people assumed the Governor was coming. The police band was heard only to see these two 'monkeys' step out!

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : The same day it was ruled, nobody should have a cart with more than two horses. It was published in the gazette too.

Randor Guy: (Laughs) What's this ice cream you are talking about?

**Janakiram** : It was almost like an invention. You know there's a lane between P ORR and Sons and India Silk House, they had a shop there, where they started this and people used to come in cars.

Randor Guy: Probably that was the first place in Madras where ice cream was sold.

Was there any brand name for that?

**Janakiram** : No. Only 'Ice Cream'.

Randor Guy: Just 'Ice Cream'? What was the shop called?

**Janakiram** : I don't remember. Much later, some tailor's shop was opened there. I remember myself as a child watching my father turn the crank to churn.

00:46:08-00:51:22

Randor Guy: In MPPC, when you joined as the camera assistant, what was the first film you worked on?

**Janakiram** : *Chandika*.

Randor Guy: That's a Telugu film made by R Prakash with Kannaambaa. Was it a pseudo-historical one?

**Janakiram** : Yes, and there was a very great artist called...

Randor Guy: Bellary Raghavachari.

**Janakiram** : Bellary Raghavachari. He was a great Shakespearean actor.

Randor Guy: And a dramatist. I've heard so many things about him.

**Janakiram** : We had the pleasure of watching him. His voice was so good like brass.

And have you heard of Dommeti Suryanarayana?

Randor Guy: Hero of *Kanakatara*!

**Janakiram** : And Vemuri Gaggaiah. And I used to love the songs. *Rangoon Rowdy*...

Randor Guy: It was a famous play.

**Janakiram** : Kannaambaa was the heroine. Dommeti Suryanarayana was the hero. He kicks her when he comes to know she has begotten a child of someone else. And he'd start the song like a long chant and the whole theatre would reverberate with his fine singing. He would have kicked her and when she falls down, he'd be holding her by her hair and sing...

Randor Guy: That was in *Rangoon Rowdy*?

**Janakiram** : Yes, Dommeti Suryanarayana ...

Randor Guy : I know the name.

**Janakiram** : A fine artist!

Randor Guy: And this *Chandika*, was it a successful film?

**Janakiram** : No, it wasn't.

Randor Guy: That's what I heard.

**Janakiram** : Not well finished. There was a lot of quarrel and Nagabhooshanam Kannaambaa's husband also did a little directing.

Randor Guy: Prakash walked out?

Janakiram:. So it was not successful.

Randor Guy: What was the picture you made for Subramanyam? Because he made lots of pictures that time.

**Janakiram** : That was the time of the finishing stage of *Tyagabhoomi*. K J Mahadev was the hero. And A D Subbulakshmi was there.

Randor Guy: And Papanasam Sivan, Baby Saroja.

**Janakiram** : I was involved in the picturization of the huts burning in the last scene of *Bhakta Cheta* . I was one of the...

Randor Guy: *Bhakta Cheta* also was already made?

**Janakiram** : It was in the finishing stage.

Randor Guy: It was released in 1940.

**Janakiram** : The actress who acted as Papanasam Sivan's wife in the movie, acted in some TV drama that I watched some 3, 4 days back. Old but beautiful, I forgot her name.

Randor Guy: Not Kumudini?

**Janakiram** : No, no. Kumudini was...

Randor Guy: Much later...

**Janakiram** : Much later. I was one of the cameramen for *Matrubhoomi*. Kumudini was in that.

Randor Guy: H M Reddy...

**Janakiram** : He bought and made the picture.

Randor Guy: Talking again about K Subramanyam, can you say something more about the man? I knew him only towards the end of his life and not very well, I was still a student at that time.

**Janakiram** : I don't know how, but in many of the things I saw Mr Subramanyam's name was not completely (inaudible).

Randor Guy: I know, I know, I'm trying to make amends.

**Janakiram** : Many of the things I saw, I don't know whether due to prejudice or what, I respected him as one of the best...

Randor Guy: One of the best film makers.

**Janakiram** : Film maker who knew the job, educated, very closely connected with Sir C P. He was the only man who'd come with Sir C P in the coach around the Gemini Circle and people would be waiting to catch a glimpse. Do you remember, Subramanyam also resembled Sir C P. Then Subramanyam was taken to Travancore Maharaja.

Randor Guy: He made the film *Anantasayanam* in which he acted also, and Padmini...

**Janakiram** : Yes. In those things I had some difference of opinions about Shantaram and Subramanyam. They were not happy to allow their wives to act with other men.

Randor Guy: Who?

**Janakiram** : Subramanyam and Shantaram did the same thing with...

Randor Guy: Jeyashree?

**Janakiram** : That's one of the reasons why the pictures failed. Once I remember very well, somebody wrote an article about *Tyagabhumi*, questioning how the heroine begets a child, when not even a slight show of intimacy is seen on screen! I remember that.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : It was quite true. Talkatone was one of the...

Randor Guy: Magazines at that time.

**Janakiram** : It was not allowed inside Gemini. Anybody coming from Talkatone would be dismissed. Because Talkatone used to give very frank...

**Randor Guy** : Thambi... P K Thambi and Vasu later on.

**Janakiram** : Very few magazines were there and P K Thambi was quite a moneyed man and he was a Mudaliar. Outspoken too. It was put up on the noticeboard in Gemini that nobody from Talkatone should be allowed.

Randor Guy: (Laughs)

00:51:23-00:58:42

Randor Guy: Talking of MPPC...

**Janakiram** : Subramanyam wanted to make the picture *Nartanamurali*, on a very big scale. He brought Gopinath...

Randor Guy: Thangamani...

**Janakiram** : Thangamani. For some time, there was an office on Kutcheri Road in Mylapore...

Randor Guy: MUAC- Madras United Artists Corporation.

**Janakiram** : Over there, *Nartanamurali* was planned on a large scale, but he could not finish it.

Randor Guy: I see, did he start shooting for that?

**Janakiram** : No, not at all. He was just planning on a big scale and during that time, they were contemplating the closure at Gemini and...

Randor Guy: And what were the other films you worked on, with MPPC, apart from *Tyagabhumi*?

**Janakiram** : MPPC... number of pictures.

Randor Guy: Do you remember anything?

**Janakiram** : *Illalu*,

Randor Guy: Kanchanamala, Ramabrahmam?

**Janakiram** : *Raithu Bidda* and *Mala Pilla*.

Randor Guy: All the films you worked as...

**Janakiram** : As first assistant to Bose and Kamal Ghosh.

Randor Guy: As focus assistant. And what happened afterwards? MPPC caught fire and some things happened, Subbulakshmi told.

**Janakiram** : There was a great Bengali editor, I forgot his name. They brought some reels from elsewhere here to keep and then burnt it.

Randor Guy: You mean sabotage?

**Janakiram** : Yes, pure sabotage. Well planned. Even if they knew who had done it, they could not do anything. It was the Bengali faction that had done it. I may be talking about the leader of that group by name... the Bengali editor... some Veer... Dharam Veer or something...

Randor Guy: I can check on that. I believe Subramanyam made a Hindi film called *Prem Bandhan*.

**Janakiram** : *Prem Sagar!*

Randor Guy: Yes, Correct. It was originally *Inba Sagaram*. But that *Prem Sagar* failed I believe.

**Janakiram** : Banerjee was the hero.

Randor Guy: I believe Srinivasa Rao too acted in it.

**Janakiram** : Yes, P S Srinivasa Rao. There was one more boy whose name I forget, who later went away to Bombay.

Randor Guy: Did you work in Prem Sagar?

**Janakiram** : Yeah.

Randor Guy: You did?

**Janakiram** : Only as an assistant.

Randor Guy: What kind of a film was that?

**Janakiram** : First Hindi Social film...

Randor Guy: Made in Madras! That's what I had heard.

**Janakiram** : That way, Subramanyam had many firsts.

Randor Guy: Even *Balayogini*, *Sevasadanam*, *Tyagabhumi*...

**Janakiram** : Everything! Why, even *Bhakta Cheta!* He was actually outcast by brahmins.

Randor Guy: I know, I know.

**Janakiram** : I remember that very well.

Randor Guy: And this *Tyagabhumi* was banned by the British.

**Janakiram** : Because of the name and the conception of the story was a little bold.

Randor Guy: Yea, very bold. How long did it run before it was banned? Nobody is able to give a correct picture about it.

**Janakiram** : One thing I remember is, what you call by the word 'Gate crashing'- it happened then. I remember it ran for about two to three weeks, not for long.

Randor Guy: That's all?

**Janakiram** : Because...

Randor Guy: Why I'm asking is, there are opinions from some interested parties that it was a box office success.

**Janakiram** : It was not.

Randor Guy: Of course, it was a classic of Indian cinema, I saw it recently just a few weeks ago when they showed it in the festival. I saw it for the first time in '82 when they showed it for Ramnoth CTA. S D Subbulakshmi sat by my side and saw the picture. Why I'm asking is, B N Rao told me that Vasan told him in one of the many chats they had, that one of the reasons he ventured into production was to make good the losses he suffered in distribution and that one such loss was because of *Tyagabhumi*. He financed *Tyagabhumi*, it was the first picture that he financed.

**Janakiram** : No, that's not correct. I don't know if it's right to say, even that time, Subramanyam was too kind to people and there were many people who took advantage of him and squandered his money. There was one Mahadevan ...*Malai Muzhungi* Mahadevan...

Randor Guy: Yes, *Malai Muzhungi* Mahadevan, I've heard.

**Janakiram** : And one Paiyasa. His actual name was Sitaraman, but was called Paiyasa. You know the automatic telephone had come then, you drop a coin and push the buttons to call. Other wise you can't call. You know what the managers did, they used to break that box open and take the cash and use it. And then when we all were starving, the artists Rajakumari and others used to collect some money and bring some ground nuts and make *sundal* for us to eat.

Randor Guy: That was how *Kacha Devyani* was made?

**Janakiram** : And whatever money came in, it'll be shared and distributed amongst the technicians.

Randor Guy: Which means you were not paid properly?

**Janakiram** : That's because we had given a promise to the producers that we would finish it and give. So whatever the producers could give on a particular day, we would share. Such co-operation, we can't expect now. Thambu, Yellappa, Ranga Rao and myself... Ranga Rao would sit in the van and make packets of the cash and give.

Randor Guy: So much involvement!

**Janakiram** : We created a world record, if I remember correctly, twelve pictures were made in that period and only one picture failed miserably- *Suryaputri*.

Randor Guy: *Suryaputri*, Ellis R Dungan!

**Janakiram** : Yes, Ellis R Dungan and Chellam...

Randor Guy: K R Chellam and Rajakumari also was there. Kothamangalam Seenu...

**Janakiram** : In one of the scenes, (Inaudible) they started quarrelling. Rajeswara Rao didn't know English. Once he gifted a present to Bai on her birthday and she thanked him. Instead of saying 'No Mention', he said 'No menses'.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : She was educated, had a good voice and knew English well. She got offended and there was a ruckus.

Randor Guy: She was recently here for a few days.

JanakiramL: She had married a Zamindar.

Randor Guy: Kolanka! (Inaudible) We are in close touch.

**Janakiram** : She sang a song in that very well. (Inaudible)

Randor Guy: She lives in Mysore now. She has two sons through that Zamindar, Raja of Kolanka. They are the distributors for Halda products. Typewriters and such.

00:58:43-01:09:12

**Janakiram** : Do you know Indira Acharya?

Randor Guy: The one who was in (inaudible)? Now she's Mrs U N R Rao.

**Janakiram** : That's now. There was a film *Meera*... by MPPC. And for that B N R Rao was...

Randor Guy: B Narasimha Rao, the music director...

**Janakiram** : Yes, he directed.

Randor Guy: *Meerabai*.

**Janakiram** : Those days, outdoor shoots would be in Botanical Gardens, where you have the train now... The cameraman was Chavan, who didn't know English. The scene is such that the king is walking in the garden and Meera, with her friends, peeps from behind the bushes as she looks at him. Usually these kind of silent shots are kept for last. And he said, "When I say 'action', you just peep from between the curtains", clearly confusing crotons with curtains. Now, Indira Acharya was the first educated lady in movies and she was quite confused with this utterance.

Randor Guy: (laughs) She was Meerabai in that movie?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Have you heard about Kutti?

Randor Guy: Kutti?

**Janakiram** : The picture was *Kutti* and the director was T P Kailasam.

Randor Guy: Of course, I've heard of him.

**Janakiram** : You must have heard the jokes also?

Randor Guy: Yes, T P Kailasam, typical ass! Falls under my...(inaudible) (laughs):

**Janakiram** : Falls under my... (inaudible) ( laughs). A very learned man!

Randor Guy: Yes, a famous writer.

**Janakiram** : In Kannada, knew some 8, 10 languages.

Randor Guy: He was a linguist.

**Janakiram** : Once while he was lying down, this man went and told him to remove his 'testicles' as they were giving a glare!

Randor Guy: Oh! (laughs) he meant to say 'spectacles'!

**Janakiram** : Yes. And Kailasam was aghast saying how could they give out a glare when he had worn proper under pants! Have you heard of P S Gnanam?

Randor Guy: A great artist!

**Janakiram** : Hers again was the last shot. There was an argument over whether she should move towards the camera or the camera towards her. It was at last decided that she should come towards the camera and the camera man told her ‘ *Koodhi aaja!*’, instead of “*Khud hi aa ja*”. She was so offended!

Randor Guy: ‘*Koodhi*’ in tamil is an abuse.

**Janakiram** : And he was totally ignorant of the commotion he had created! You know *Nandanar* of K B Sundarambal failed and some other one’s *Nandanar* was successful. K B Sundarambal’s failed because it was shot in Calcutta...

Randor Guy: By M L Tandon.

**Janakiram** : And Nigam was the recording engineer. They used to chew betel leaves with...

Randor Guy: With betel nuts?

**Janakiram** : No, with *chunam*.

Randor Guy: With lime!

**Janakiram** : And people would tell him to ask her for *chunam* and he’d hesitate as he didn’t know Tamil. But they’d goad him and he went and asked her to give ‘*chunniam*’ and all hell broke loose!

Randor Guy: (Laughs)

**Janakiram** : She was at the peak then. She had sung that famous song “ *Pandita Motilal Nehruvai Pagadi koduththome*”. Lakhs and lakhs were spent. And she was the first woman to get one and a half lakhs as remuneration!

Randor Guy: Yes, she got a lakh of rupees for that movie!

**Janakiram** : And she gave away everything to the Congress Fund without touching that money! She took umbrage to that prank and was very offended with such tomfoolery. And the whole movie was made non-sync. And he, being the recordist didn't know how to sync the non-sync portions. To be very frank, it was Srinivasa Raghavan, Chandru and myself ... the three of us invented dubbing. How it happened was that we went for an outdoor shooting for *Panduranga*. The sound track was lost somehow...

Randor Guy: That was Vale Pictures?

**Janakiram** : Yes. And we were wondering how to re-shoot. Those days we used to be like a family... there was one Sundaram Vadhyar...

Randor Guy: T K Sundara Vadhyar.

**Janakiram** : Now-a- days a few slight changes here and there are accepted but those days, everything had to be the way it was in the script. If I watched the footage several times, I could guess the dialogues correctly and I was told to write them down. There was one editor by name Natarajan.

Randor Guy: He died recently.

**Janakiram** : One of the best editors.

Randor Guy: E B Nataraja Mudaliar. He died a month back.

**Janakiram** : He's the brother in law of M P Rajan.

Randor Guy: He was the Chief Editor at Newtowne.

**Janakiram** : We went and procured a little bit of film from the producer of Tamil Nadu Talkies.

Randor Guy: Soundara Raja Iyengar.

**Janakiram :** Yes. He demanded to know why we wanted it. We said we'd tell him later. We used it as a loop now and then as both Srinivasan and I had the inventive bent of mind. When I purchased equipment for my own studio... have you heard of that studio?

Randor Guy: Where was it?

**Janakiram :** On Poonamallee High Road.

Randor Guy: National Movietone? Srinivasa Cinetone?

**Janakiram :** No, Kubera Films.

Randor Guy: That was on Landons Road. Nellore people... Markandeya...

**Janakiram :** Yes, Chiranjeevi...There was one rice merchant named Venkaiyah. His only interest was to have Kanchanamala as his love interest. For that reason, he produced films. He was the sole supplier of rice for the whole of Madras. Multi-millionaire. Because he failed to win her over, he lost his mind, abandoned the studio and spent time at a concubine's house. Can you believe me when I say, that I purchased the studio equipment for just Rs.13450?

Randor Guy: The entire equipment?

**Janakiram :** Yes. Henley Cables five cases, lights, camera and two music equipment...I was keen to start on my own and Embar Aiyah, Bindhu Madhavan and Ramaswamy the recordist had agreed to join me. We went and saw the studio and decided to buy. He was in Nellore at a prostitute's house. We too went to Nellore and waited outside. Seeing us in the morning, he was very angry. There was a minister Reddy, do you know?

Randor Guy: Gopal Reddy, he too was from Nellore.

**Janakiram** : Yes. Where Hotel Ashoka stands now, it was called Mulagala House. He was residing there.

Randor Guy: On Pantheon Road.

**Janakiram** : We met him and briefed him. He advised us to speak to Venkaiah's mother as she was the final authority, Reddy said. And all she wanted was that his debts should be paid off in exchange for the studio equipment. We went around and found out his debts stood at around Rs.13,800. Even one box of Henley Cable which was an imported one, was quite expensive and we were apprehensive how that amount could be equated to the studio equipment and voiced our concern to Gopal Reddy. But he assured us that so long as Venkaiah's mother agreed to sign away, we need not worry. So we purchased the equipment, the very next day, we had to flee Madras because of the fear of bombing in the war. Only Vasam knew that I was going away to Mysore. He had an adviser by name Ganesa Iyer...

Randor Guy: Yes, I know.

**Janakiram** : And one Kodak Ramaiyyar. These two didn't like me at all. Whenever I went to meet Moilon in his room, I would sit before him and talk, while he, despite being the manager, would always stand and talk. My behaviour didn't go down well with him and one day he called me to his room under the pretext of resolving some complaint by Kannamba, but had deliberately removed all chairs. I heard him and asked him to provide me a seat so that I can explain my stand. He said Mr Vasam would be very upset with me for my behaviour and I replied I had not misbehaved with Kannamba or any such thing, so why should he get upset? They used to intercept my correspondences and knew of my intentions to start on my own and had carried

tales to Mr Vasan. But he was very much aware of it as I had requested him to help me out in my endeavours. And he had graciously sent his two permanent employees Bindhu Madavan and Ramaswamy to assist me. When the time came, he said, “These gates are always open for you, you are welcome”.

01:09:13-01:12:43

Randor Guy: To go back a little, after Subramanyam’s studio went up in flames, Vasan took over through Court of Law.

**Janakiram** : How it happened was... the studio owed us all money. And I was in a very bad position, I could not do anything against Subramanyam and he was the Managing Director. We started our own Madras Studios Limited.

Randor Guy: Who all were involved in that?

**Janakiram** : Myself, P K Viswanathan...

Randor Guy: Recordist?

**Janakiram** : and Jaindas Gupta.

Randor Guy: The lab man!

**Janakiram** : And Ranga Rao. But we wanted a studio but didn’t have money. So we filed a case.

Randor Guy: Against MPPC?

**Janakiram** : Yes, we were owed ten months’ salary. But we had completed all twelve pictures and only *Suryaputri* was a failure. All others were good pictures.

Randor Guy: While talking about *Suryaputri*, we were talking of some snake pit.

**Janakiram** : Yes, Chellam!

Randor Guy: K R Chellam.

**Janakiram** : She used to cry like anything and we used to tease her saying how come she's crying for this while she did more daring things in forest for *Vanaraja Karzan!*  
There was one Iyer who was involved with her for a long time...

Randor Guy: Krishnaswamy Iyengar.

**Janakiram** : We used to refer to him as Chellam Krishnaswamy Iyengar!

Randor Guy: (Laughs) She's alive and I've done a programme like this with her.

**Janakiram** : Yes, I read that.

Randor Guy: So you started this Madras Studios...

**Janakiram** : For that we filed a suit and we won that case.

Randor Guy: For the arrears...

**Janakiram** : Yes, the money had to be paid in the court. We got M P Sundar Rajan to represent us.

Randor Guy: He was Vasana's lawyer.

**Janakiram** : Yes. And he got Vasana to finance them for the payment. They were not happy. The condition was that all technicians should get their dues paid and we got the payment. There's no point in going into that story now. Vasana had a car with the number 2484. He came and I was the one who broke the seal and opened the gate. It had been sealed by us earlier. I didn't feel good about facing Mr Subramanyam as I had gone against him to file the case. Vasana called me the one with the lucky hand. But Sundara Rajan played a dirty game.

Randor Guy: He always did. He was notorious for that. (laughs)

**Janakiram** : He'd always be shaking his legs. We called him *thaiyalkaran* because of that.

Randor uy: What was the name?

**Janakiram** : Tailor- *thaiyalkaran*. He was the one who instigated Kanchanamala, otherwise things would have been fine. My own miseries too were because of that. Kanchanamala lost her career itself because of that. I said something in jest and things took a different turn.

01:12:44-01:24:58

Randor Guy: Later when Gemini was started, you worked for Vasani in the same camera department.

**Janakiram** : Mine was the first name in the book of appointments in Gemini. He asked Moilon how much I should be given as salary and Moilon told me to talk to Mr Vasani myself about it. I told Mr Vasani that I had come to learn on the job and I should not be treated as a servant but be treated as his son. Vasani just smiled and from then on, till the time I left, I would never be called into the office to get payment. Instead there was a cashier by name Ramamurthy, and he would hand over a sum of money in an envelope as honorarium in my room. Ramamurthy was the one who made the grand arrangements for Vasani's son's wedding. He created a museum-like setting.

Randor Guy: Rajeswara Rao the music director told me that the first production of Gemini was *Jeevan Mukti*, the Telugu version of *Bhakta Cheta*.

**Janakiram** : Yes, Suri Babu was the hero.

Randor Guy: And that only then they started *Madanakamarajan*. Is that correct?

**Janakiram** : Very correct.

Randor Guy: It was originally started by Dindigul Amritam Talkies. Because I have an advertisement of *Madanakamarajan*.

**Janakiram** : Did you know of a film that was completed but re-shot?

Randor Guy: Ramnath did it after BN Rao had completed it.

**Janakiram** : Yes. The full picture was completed but again retaken. There was a heroine by name N A Sundaram.

Randor Guy: Yes, there was such an artist. Did you work on that *Jeevan Mukti*?

**Janakiram** : Yes, fully.

Randor Guy: See, *Bhakta Cheta* was a very big success with K Subramanyam, S D Subbulakshmi, Papanasam Sivan.

**Janakiram** : There was one shot in that which can be called as my invention.

Randor Guy: I don't know...

**Janakiram** : There were three cameras. And I had the camera of the 80 feet film, the hand-held one. We were shooting the fire scene from different angles.

Randor Guy: Three cameras were engaged to shoot the 'huts on fire' scene?

**Janakiram** : Mine was a life-size camera, a big teak-wooden one. Jothi Sinha had presented me.

Randor Guy: Spring-driven? Once every 27 feet?

**Janakiram** : Yes. While filming it, I got an idea to reverse the shot.

Randor Guy: Upside down shot?

**Janakiram** : No, reverse the camera to show the flames going in. It was well appreciated by K Subramanyam.

Randor Guy: They used your shots as it is?

**Janakiram** : Yes.

Randor Guy: Interesting! That was in *Bhakta Cheta*?

**Janakiram** : Yes.

Randor Guy: Why did *Jeevan Mukti* fail? Any particular reason?

**Janakiram** : See, with Subramaniam, more than the story, his way of treatment was different. You may narrate the same story to four different people...

Randor Guy: But their treatment will be different.

**Janakiram** : Yes. I have been narrating my story to many people for the last 22 years, even while on a train. I have no issues doing that. One can steal a story, but can't steal the way one works. One day I want you to hear my story. It's titled *Azhiyada Anbu*.

Randor Guy: You are making that picture?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Everything got ready. But in October, my pelvic bone broke and thereafter I purchased this folding wheel chair. Since I've embarked on making the movie, I wanted to test myself if I can get the judgement and colour correction and such. I made a film with 100 slides for the Lions Club with Eye Donation as the subject, with the slogan, " One dead man's eyes can give vision to two blind men". After that I thought why not make a movie as well and did one titled "Netradaanam" and it won the Lions International award for the subject and quality. Actress Manjula's husband...

Randor Guy: Vijaya Kumar.

**Janakiram** : I used a colourful saree as backdrop- it won't look like a saree but like some colour smudged and with sharp focus on him. He looks into the camera and says" Do you know a secret? A dead man can bring life to two eyes!" I had his voice over for two shots- Just outside this window I got all trash gathered and burnt it for one shot and got some stones piled up and painted like some tomb for the other. The

voice over says, “here’s a man cremated and there’s another buried. If only they had donated their eyes to the Eye Bank, four blind ones could have got their vision”. I got permission to shoot an eye operation for the film. I am a founder member and a permanent member of the Eye Bank. Cooper was the one who taught me how to frame a shot irrespective of it being over or under exposed. Framing is very important. Lighting can be corrected even in a lab so long as the picture is seen. Composing the frame is very important. There was a shot of one African singer singing in an English film. She stands alone and just a single blade of the sugarcane grass is there in front of the camera other than her, such a beautiful frame it was! Moilon is my Guru in all those matters. Once Gemini studio was going to be confiscated...

Randor Guy: Why?

**Janakiram** : The army had already taken over the equipment of B N Reddy’s and Vauhini studios and it was now the turn on Gemini studios. Just behind Gemini studios on Kodambakkam High Road was the Anti-Air Raid Base and Moilon was the director of ARPFF- Air Raid Precaution Force. I was kind of his right-hand man and I used to be around him. He wanted two documentaries made and I made it with a few others. He had gifted me a 16mm camera. He insisted on the use of light meters. He would erect a set, light it up, shoot, develop and see the rushes and only then move on to the next shoot. Obvioulsy, this was not possible always. But luck favoured him.

Randor Guy: Talking of Moilon, wasn’t he associated also with Ellis R Dungan?

**Janakiram** : I’ll share some photos of Moilon with his sons and my daughter-in-law in London. He treated me like his son.

**Janakiram** : Ellis R Dungan brought him here. He was his pilot, so to say. Moilon had already made two films for the British government titled (inaudible). He became familiar with the Governor that way...

Randor Guy: Sir Arthur Hope.

**Janakiram** : He went to the Governor's bungalow and took pictures of his room, every nook and corner and erected a set just like that in the studio, before the Governor came to visit the studio. The visit was to be filmed for War Fund and shown to people to receive liberal donations to the War Fund and I was to be the camera man. He had trained me to load the film and get the camera ready to shoot in less than a minute. He got an Anglo-Indian and posted him with uniform as a guard at the gates and cordoned off the set. The journalists were all there and Vasam too had come early to receive the Governor and all were wondering why the set was cordoned off. Moilon lived across the studio on Nungambakkam High Road at Bobbili Raja's house and he came just in time before the Governor arrived. He said the Governor should alight at the gate and walk to the studio inside so that he can have a good look at the way we were maintaining the studios and sets and that's what happened. The Governor's visit was filmed live and before he could leave, the film was developed and shown to him. The Governor got so impressed and he decided to spare Gemini from being confiscated. Vasam was in tears when he learnt about it and profusely thanked Moilon for rescuing him and the studio.

01:24:59-01:32:03

Randor Guy: After this *Jeevan Mukti*, what was the next picture? Did you work in *Madanakamarajan* also?

**Janakiram :** Yes. V V Sadagopan was the hero.

Randor Guy: M V Rajamma, K L V Vasanta, Durairaj, Kothamangalam Subbu and all those people...*Madanakamarajan* was a big success, I think. Directed by B N Rao. Did you know him well?

**Janakiram :** Very well.

Randor Guy: Can you tell me something about him?

**Janakiram :** If I'm not wrong, at one point of time he had 50 pairs of shoes.

Randor Guy: Very stylish man? That's what everybody says.

**Janakiram :** Very stylish man. I too used to wear patent leather shoes as I was from Bangalore. In that sense, we used to compete, so to say. He was the only well-dressed one.

Randor Guy: He also used to sport a tie, I have heard. Was he a good director?

**Janakiram :** He was a Malayalee.

Randor Guy: I know, he had told me he was Balakrishnan Nair actually. He's a good friend and we keep in touch.

**Janakiram :** He didn't have much education but he could be in command of whatever he did.

Randor Guy: He must have been a successful director. He made some successful pictures like *Gumastavin Penn*, *Boologa Rambai*, *Rambaiyin Kadhal*, *Madanakamarajan*...

**Janakiram :** Hit pictures all. Later there was some tiff with Vasam, but a good director and a good man.

Randor Guy: Socially, a very good man. After *Madanakamarajan*. Did you do *Dasi Aparanji* or any other picture?

**Janakiram** : I did both the versions.

Randor Guy: Was B N Rao's version scrapped completely? You said the first version was by him. It had Pushpavalli and she played Aparanji and N A Sundaram also was in it.

Jankairam: She was the one in the second version.

Randor Guy: But the version which got released was the one with Pushpavalli.

**Janakiram** : Yes, the one of N A Sundaram was the one which got scrapped.

Randor Guy: That was the first version then.

**Janakiram** : I used to tease her singing.

Randor Guy: Oh, she was a singer?

**Janakiram** : In the song "*Nayaganai...*", she used to sing the word *Nayaganai* by breaking the syllables as "*Naai aganai...*" And I used to tease why she was chopping *Naai*(dog)to pieces.

Randor Guy: (laughs) in true Carnatic style perhaps!

**Janakiram** : Her father used to be around in the sets. But her portions were removed.

Randor Guy: And Pushpavalli was retained. I believe even Pushpavalli's portions ias Aparanji, were reshot by Ramnoth? Kothamangalam Seenu told me.

**Janakiram** : I don't know because by that time I went away to Mysore.

Randor Guy: Oh,you left? So you did just a few films with Gemini?

**Janakiram** : Many. *Barrister Parvati...*

Randor Guy: The Telugu film by R Prakash. That was shot in Gemini?

**Janakiram** : G Varalakshmi was introduced in it. It was shot under MPPC and the remaining portions under Gemini. That too was a failure I think.

Randor Guy: It was supposed to be a comedy. There was a famous book. When did you leave Gemini?

**Janakiram** : In 1942 or 43, immediately after the war. I had purchased these equipment...

Randor Guy: What about *Balanagamma*? Were you involved in it? It was very big success. Can you tell me something about it? It brought about the downfall of Kanchanamala!

**Janakiram** : For that movie we needed some children to be hired every day at a rate of Rs 10.

Randor Guy: The remuneration was Rs 10 per day per child?

**Janakiram** : Yes, and one woman used to come and leave the child for the shooting and wait at the gate to pick up the child and collect the money, clad in a white saree and she would stink like anything, so poor was she. Can you guess who she was? She was V S Saroja. Have you heard of her?

Randor Guy: Yes.

**Janakiram** : It was her child that she brought. She was working in a circus and that circus company folded up and she was on the look out for work.

Randor Guy: She had a child at that time? Wasn't she working at Gemini later? A group dancer?

**Janakiram** : She came to leave the child for shootings to begin with. In *Mangamma Sabatham*...

Randor Guy: I saw her in that, she's there. She's in that '*Dheekudu dheekudu*'

**Janakiram** : There was a scene where one had to jump like some somersault and not many could do that. She, as she had been in a circus, came to teach that and picked up from there. She had a good figure as a young woman, got married to Bholenath, a dance master.

Randor Guy: Bholenath Sharma, dance director.

**Janakiram** : He died and she had all the properties. The original wife is still alive.

Randor Guy: Still alive? She acted in small roles in *Kannagi* too. I saw *Kannagi* at the festival a couple of weeks ago. Interestingly, I wrote that In *Kannagi*, apart from Kannamba, there was T A Jayalakshmi, the sisters Mangalam-Yogam are all playing junior artists.

**Janakiram** : I know Mangalam-Yogam very well but so many things cannot be told.

(laughs) Do you know Chitra Krishnaswamy?

Randor Guy: Yes, he's now in Singapore.

**Janakiram** : The elder one...

Randor Guy: Yogam.

**Janakiram** : She's with...and the younger one with (inaudible) later on she married...

Randor Guy: Mangalam is here in Madras. I'm trying to make her talk like this in one of the programmes and she has agreed.

**Janakiram** : Very brilliant artist. They were all child artists.

Randor Guy: In early days?

**Janakiram** : With K Subramanyam.

Randor Guy: In *Sevasadanam*?

**Janakiram** : In *Balayogi*.

Randor Guy: I know, I've seen that photograph.

**01:32:04-01:40:28**

Randor Guy: This Navajothi Studios that you started in Mysore city, how did that come about?

**Janakiram** : Because I had that ambition. If I had to have a studio, I must make a film.

Randor Guy: You wanted to produce a film?

**Janakiram** : To produce a film it'd cost a lot. And we knew how to increase the cost for the producer by doing things slowly.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : I was studying all that while learning my job. I felt I could make a movie economically, if I had my own studio. To be frank, one day we didn't have money and Bindhu Madhav, Ramaswamy, Embar Ayyah and self travelled without ticket.

Randor Guy: You were all directors of the company! From Madras to Mysore? You didn't have money to even buy the ticket? (laughs)

**Janakiram** : I knew a little about the railway system. Like, if you are caught without ticket anytime, you can claim you got in only at the previous station- like if caught at Bangalore, we could say we had boarded only at Jolarpet and pay fine only for that stretch of journey.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : Somehow... we also managed to get the equipment.

Randor Guy: From Kubera. Kubera was on one corner of Landons Road...

**Janakiram** : One end was on that side. The main entrance was on Poonamallee High Road. Now some State Bank Colony, Reserve Bank Colony have come up. Those days, it was a godown for military costumes too. We had so many things to take away from there. There were phones too which we packed away.

Randor Guy: So you took them all away to Mysore and called it Navajothi Studios. Where was this?

**Janakiram** : The studio came later. I had dismantled the entire set of Markandeya alongwith all make-up paraphernalia...

Randor Guy: Like wigs...from Kubera? You took everything?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Because I was with Moilon, I was very familiar with many Europeans. I have taken pictures of them in the Cosmopolitan Club. The General Manager of M S M Railway was well known to me.

Randor Guy: Who was it?

**Janakiram** : McPherson I think.

Randor Guy: Not G W Gorden? He came later...

**Janakiram** : I went to him and told my story that I was a technician who had purchased all these studio items and had to transport them. Those days even to transport one film tin one had to pay Rs 100 as charges. Given that it was war time, it was impossible. But he granted me five wagons and called his assistants to help. I went the Great Durbar hotel nearby which was the only hotel open then owing to blackout...

Randor Guy: Where was this Great Durbar Hotel?

**Janakiram** : At Mount Road corner.

Randor Guy: Is it still there? Must be the oldest non vegetarian hotel.

**Janakiram** : There's this Ellis Road...

Randor Guy: Yes, the Great Durbar Hotel... that was the only one, is it?

**Janakiram** : 6 annas for biryani.

Randor Guy: 6 annas? 36 paise per plate of biryani!

**Janakiram** : I'm fond of *paaya* and *aappam*. I took some 20 packets of chicken biryani as parcel and gave it to the coolies at the station as some incentive, because I had to load the items early as there was the risk of Madras being bombed anytime. Within 15, 20 minutes they loaded my things. I was given one open wagon too, in that I loaded the cooling coils that we need for the lab. There were five steel tanks with lead lining for those long coils. Jatin Dasgupta tried his level best to have it from me, he even told Vasana as he was the lab-in-charge at Gemini.

Randor Guy: He later on started Madras Cine Lab.

**Janakiram** : Yes. And he had a friend K Venkatraman, who was a fraud.

Randor Guy: Yes, Fraud Venkatraman!

**Janakiram** : He came to Gemini for work.

Randor Guy: Oh, he worked in Gemini?

**Janakiram** : The director of *Jeevan Mukti*...

Randor Guy: T P Neelakantan?

Janakiram; Yes, he got him from Vellore to assist him at one time. An entirely different story.

Randor Guy: So you loaded all the stuff...

**Janakiram** : Because of evacuation orders, one couldn't go anywhere, had to stay put at Central station, even sleeping there itself. There was one small hotel near the station opposite the post office in a small lane. There used to be a long queue for idly and then this Great Durbar. No other hotel or shop was open. Once I reached Mysore, I engaged 60 carts...

Randor Guy: 60 bullock carts?

**Janakiram** : Yes, to take all the dismantled set properties like pillars and all and it became the talk of the town in Mysore! There was a place called Dalawai Garden...

Randor Guy: How far was it from Mysore?

**Janakiram** : Exactly 3 miles from Mysore on the Bangalore-Mysore Road. Ramaswamy Mudaliar was my relative.

Randor Guy: He was the Dewan of Mysore?

**Janakiram** : Yes. I had invited him and I received a medal. At the Mysore exhibition, I conducted a session "How a movie talks" with the help of a Moviola and screen and the charge was eight annas per head. I managed it with bits and pieces of *Markandeya* and he gave me a gold medal. I invited him to our studio. One end of the studio was (Inaudible) and the other end was a road coming from (inaudible).

Randor Guy: At Dalawai Gardens?

**Janakiram** : Yes. There used to be a bridge there. Don't know what happened to it later. That area was named Navajothi Nagar and that was between Mysore North and Mysore South and quite a few trains except express trains and some mainlines, would stop at that station for two minutes.

Randor Guy: You had a railway station for your studio?

**Janakiram** : Yes, I got one sanctioned.

Randor Guy: By Ramaswamy Mudaliar?

**Janakiram** : Yes. But it turned out to be a tragic story. The result was that I got Cerebral Malaria. The statistics was that only one among 2000 affected will survive. I was saved by the Attebrin injection and tablet of Bayers.

01:40:29-01:54:28

Randor Guy: What happened to the studio?

**Janakiram** : A group of my own people stabbed me at the back. My father died at Raja of Pithapur's house.

Randor Guy: In Madras?

**Janakiram** : Yes. He was friendly with all these Raja of Bhopal... one day he got drunk on whiskey much against my mother and...

Randor Guy: So you didn't make any pictures at Navajothi...

**Janakiram** : It was started with the intention of making films, but after these incidents, I joined them as cameraman.

Randor Guy: No, you started Navajothi studios...

**Janakiram** : Yes, at Dalawai Gardens. And these people stabbed me at the back...

Randor Guy: So no work was done there?

**Janakiram** : I had been stabbed by my own folks badly. When I went back after my father's demise, I found that the studio had already been sold by them to somebody, but they didn't give me the news.

Randor Guy: Who were the others involved with you, what happened to them? This Aiyah and others?

**Janakiram :** They were all with me. Amongst them Ramaswamy was the black sheep who was in cahoots with them who were my relatives. One was a photographer and the other was an automobile...

Randor Guy: And who bought it from them?

**Janakiram :** G Ramaiyah. I used to cook my own food at the studio in Dalawai Gardens, clean up the equipment and keep them ready and they would get these money-lenders in just around that time...

Randor Guy: What happened to the studio? Didn't you do any film there?

**Janakiram :** No, not at Dalawai Gardens. We had just begun the community projects. There were three women by name Yashodharamma wife of Dasappa and Kameshwaramma and we partners too had to do all the work ourselves. We erected a lab ourselves. I wanted it to be a workers' studio where everybody is a partner with stakes. It was disliked by these people. They were waiting for an opportunity. We would have meetings and Krishnappa was the lawyer. At one such meeting, I received the telegram of my father's demise. I didn't plan to leave for Chennai as I knew the cremation won't be held up till I reached Triplicane in Madras from Mysore. The only way to travel was by train to Bangalore and from thereon to Chennai. But these people insisted that I must leave. It was my father who had died but they seemed to mourn him more than me! They saw to it that I boarded the train. Something had happened previously. One needed to have a license to buy raw stock. M V Rajamma and self had travelled to Delhi and Ramaswamy Mudaliar was the sub-prime member and a relative. His wife was my mother's classmate and such. We procured the license.

Randor Guy: You got the license to produce films...

**Janakiram** : Yes. Those days it was the British times and one can't directly go and meet the sub-prime member and security issues were there. It was also the interim government with Bhulabhai Desai and others. We were at Connaught Place. Have you heard of Fazlul Haque?

Randor Guy: Yes.

**Janakiram** : He was a member then. There was a cartoon in the papers that day featuring Fazlul Haque and Sadhana Bose dancing in front of him for a film reel. Under such circumstances, we didn't want to be seen visiting Ramaswamy Mudaliar. But in the meantime, these folks sent a telegram to Ramaswamy Mudaliar saying since the studio was getting shut down, the license was not needed at all. Ramaswamy Mudaliar called and warned me to be careful with them and not be gullible. Later since I was the only one who could speak English, they sent me to Mr Pai of Syndicate Bank. Then it was not Syndicate Bank but Canara Banking Syndicate.

Randor Guy: T M A Pai. I made a film on him.

**Janakiram** : He sanctioned a loan of one and a half lacs. These folks sent him the original agreement and said all the equipment was nothing but junk and just worth around three thousand rupees and that I was a cheat. He questioned me about it and I challenged that I'd get the chief technician of (inaudible) the only suppliers of these equipment and get him to value the equipment and whatever was the value that he arrived at, I'd take just half of that as loan. He agreed but before I could get all that done...

Randor Guy: Things got out of your hands...

**Janakiram** : Then I got affected seriously with cerebral malaria and I wanted to commit suicide.

Randor Guy: You were dejected with life!

**Janakiram** : Dasappa and others gave me a book of Vivekananda and left me alone in a room saying they'd help me die any which way I wished! And the next day when they returned, I had changed my mind and I declared I wanted to live. That's the result of that book of Vivekananda! I said, we have but one life to live and if I could live for just one extra day, I'd be happy. God has given the sense to know the difference between good and bad and why not do the best and then die?

Randor Guy: Then what did you do? Did you start your efforts again?

**Janakiram** : They made me the camera man.

Randor Guy: The studio that was your own, now there they made you the camera man!

**Janakiram** : One day I wrote a letter to Ramaiyah.

Randor Guy: He was running it?

**Janakiram** : Yes. He was a fleet owner, bus owner. G Ramaiyah. A big man in Mysore. He used to get invitation from the palace for durbar and all that. He had a huge figure and we used to call him *Genie* as in Ali Baba's genie.

Randor Guy: I have seen his photograph.

**Janakiram** : Once I wanted leave and wrote him a leave letter, addressing him as 'Dear Mr Ramaiyah' and ending it with 'Yours sincerely'. He took offence that I didn't address him as 'Dear Sir' and not end with "Yours obediently' instead. I argued that sincerity in work was more important than obedience and left the studio.

Randor Guy: So, no shooting had started?

**Janakiram** : There was one *Dhaadi* Raju...

Randor Guy: I know, C V Raju.

**Janakiram** : He was also one who worked against me and poisoned my relatives' mind, making the sell off the studio. Just as I alighted at Mysore station after returning from my father's demise...

Randor Guy: Where was *Mahananda* started?

**Janakiram** : There only. In that studio. I had started one Triveni Films.

Randor Guy: Oh, you did?

**Janakiram** : I had one Dayanidhi for music director whom we used to call 'Radha, his brother Durai was the camera man. Hunsur Krishnamurthy was my partner in Triveni Films. And one Naidu, an engineer was also there and his brother was working with me till date. He died recently some six months back. One of the best editors in Madras.

Randor Guy: By name...?

**Janakiram** : Mohan, P Mohan. He has worked also with B S Ranga. The very best editor, I never had the need to step into the editing room at all.

Randor Guy: He was so good!

**Janakiram** : He died of cancer. I had sent word to the cancer hospital about my film and he assured me to go ahead and promised to join me soon after he got alright. Because, I had never worked without him; he was the editor for all my pictures.

Randor Guy: Where was *Mahananda* shot?

**Janakiram** : At the same Navajothi Studios.

Randor Guy: At Dalawai Gardens?

**Janakiram** : No, here at Saraswatipuram.

Randor Guy: You started somewhere else?

**Janakiram** : The old one got closed after that incident after my father's demise.

Randor Guy: G Ramaiah had taken it over...

**Janakiram** : I had applied for land three acres the government gave free...

Randor Guy: At Saraswatipuram?

**Janakiram** : Yes, then they took over the whole thing.

Randor Guy: Then what happened to the land at Saraswatipuram?

**Janakiram** : That became Navajothi Studios.

Randor Guy: There were two Navajothi Studios?

**Janakiram** : The one in Dalawai Gardens got shifted here.

Randor Guy: I see, what happened to the land at Dalawai Gardens?

**Janakiram** : It was given to me at a nominal rent of Rs 400.

Randor Guy: It wasn't yours?

**Janakiram** : The maternal uncle of Maharaja was the Dalawai. Dalawai means the family Chief. He was Basavaraj and his wife was Princess Lilavati. He gave me that area on a rent of Rs. 400.

Randor Guy: So that wasn't yours, but on lease.

**Janakiram** : I was paying a rent of Rs 400 but making Rs 1300 a month by selling the coconuts, mangoes and all that was there.

Randor Guy: So the Navajothi Studios at Saraswatipuram was functioning? But you were not the proprietor there but a technician?

**Janakiram** : Yes, only a technician.

Randor Guy: You took the studio for your Triveni Films? That *Mahananda* was a Triveni production? And it was a kannada film that you directed?

**Janakiram** : A Kannada film Do you know the dance master Sohanlal? His wife Kantha was the heroine. She was an ace swimmer and had swum nonstop for 24 hours in Bangalore and all that. An educated girl and she's there still. Sohanlal is no more though.

Randor Guy: Where is she in Bangalore?

**Janakiram** : No, she's here in Madras. And I met someone in a clothes store who looked just like Chandramohan the old-time actor. A good personality. He was apprehensive as he didn't know any acting. But I convinced him.

Randor Guy: What was his name?

**Janakiram** : Viswanatha Rao.

Randor Guy: He was the hero?

**Janakiram** : There was a congress President by name Ramachandra Rao. He was his brother who owned a clothes store in Bangalore. And Aswath...

Randor Guy: I know, great Aswath.

**Janakiram** : No, this was a different Aswath, a comedian. Rajamma took a picture, you know?

Randor Guy: Yes, *Radha Ramana*. And what kind of a film was *Mahananda*?

**Janakiram** : By nature, I don't like mythological films. But the story goes thus- When Shiva is in Kailash, there is a dance and the dancer makes a mistake. Parvati laughs at that and Shiva in anger curses that she should spend time in Bhoolok as a

punishment. When all *devas* plead her case, he relents and agrees to test her and if found acceptable, he'd take her back.

Randor Guy: She is born as a human being on earth? That's the story?

**Janakiram** : Yes, it was a total failure. But the papers wrote very highly of the movie saying , 'here comes a man to save the whole world!' I made a crane for a particular shot, which was for the very first time in cinema in India. I shot the entire dance as a single shot!

Randor Guy: It must have been difficult for the artist also.

01:54:29-02:16:41

Randor Guy: Did you write the story of *Mahananda*?

**Janakiram** : I gave it a social touch.

Randor Guy: You made it contemporary.

**Janakiram** : The social message was that a woman though born to a prostitute can choose not to be one herself and that she has the power to defend her chastity. The story opens with a *Gajje Puja* being performed at the prostitute's house at the instance of this Aswath who acts as the pimp. All rich men come and bid for the girl and the girl is sold to the highest bidder for three days. But the girl is unwilling and refuses to comply with this. In the actual story, it's Lord Indra whose advances she rejects. When he touches her against her wishes, his entire body is covered with eyes. She rejects the advances of the man and in the scuffle he's hurt and becomes blind. She runs away from him and finds a leper on the way. It's actually Lord Shiva in the guise of a leper and she tends to him. The actor had done a good job as a leper with right make-up and all. People scold her for serving a leper but she's firm that serving such

people is more humane than being a prostitute. Shiva is pleased with her service she attains salvation. But the audience didn't like it and the very first day of release, they were looking to beat up the producer.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : It was released at the Sharada theatre in Bangalore. People wanted a mythological touch with elaborate celestial kind of sets and costumes and didn't take to this social treatment of the story. One paper actually had an entire supplement to say the film was very forward in its theme and should arrive a good ten years later!

Randor Guy: So the picture didn't do well...

**Janakiram** : A total failure and I learnt my lesson. Technically it was good. The single shot that I had conceived was way before Hitchcock did it in *Rope*.

Randor Guy: After *Mahananda*, what did you do?

**Janakiram** : I did nothing for a while. Later I was called to Kerala by two brothers- Shanakarnarayana Panicker and Gopalkrishna Panicker.

Randor Guy: Panicker brothers. Where were they in Kerala? What were they doing?

**Janakiram** : They were the Ambalapuzha brothers. Nadaswaram players. They had come to Mysore during the shooting of *Mahananda* as I had used *tavil* for music- for the very first time in cinema. It gave a very good effect.

Randor Guy: Who was the music director?

**Janakiram** : Dayanidhi. He was himself a good Sarod and Sitar player. There was one Narayanan, an *ezhava* by community and uneducated but had an enormous amount of money. He owned a bus service by name C K M Union and a theatre C K M Union.

Randor Guy: A very rich man.

**Janakiram** : He was into wood cutting and was straight forward. He used to visit Sabarimala every year and so was addressed as *Samy*. He wanted to picturize a popular novel *Sashidhar* by N P Chellappa Nair and I was called to direct it.

Randor Guy: So it was their production and you were the director?

**Janakiram** : I suppose it was my fourth picture in Malayalam after *Balan*, *Gnanambika* and one more... *Velli Natchatram*, no it was something else.

Randor Guy: *Navalokam*?

**Janakiram** : Those pictures had failed and I wanted to see those films and learn why they failed. One has to learn from mistakes but they dissuaded why I wanted to see what had failed. But I managed to procure the films and watch.

Randor Guy: Where was this film company, in Tellichery?

**Janakiram** : No, in Chengannur. A few miles from Kolanchery and Tiruvalla. I also wanted to learn the language before directing one in that language. I was given a room in the middle of a paddy field so that I won't have any disturbances. I employed four servants who knew only Malayalam so that I can pick up the language by conversing with them. I was also keen to observe the mannerisms of the poor people. I learnt the language and read the novel. Chellappa Nair had given some sexual overtones to the story. The hero is a coolie in a rubber estate and the heroine is the daughter of the estate owner who falls in love with him. But the owner is bringing up the girl for his own carnal desires. He doesn't wish her to be attracted to beauty. Therefore he employs only not-so-good looking ones or physically deformed ones as servants. But I changed the story. And made a big name. People even asked me if I Janakiram, was the brother of Shantaram!

Randor Guy: Who were the artists?

**Janakiram** : Kumari, Omana. Not that T R Omana.

Randor Guy: I know, Sree Lekha's mother. Sree Lekha who had acted in my film Moham.

**Janakiram** : Kottarakara Sreedharan Nair. All of them donned make-up for the first time under me. And then Ponnamma and singer Kaviyur Revamma.

Randor Guy: She was Semmangudi's disciple.

**Janakiram** : She came draped in the customary *mundu* and umbrella. I composed a song myself '*Maaran Sukumaran*' in the tune of '*Yaaro Ivar Yaaro*' and recorded it with a small recording equipment (inaudible).

Randor Guy: Where was this shot?

**Janakiram** : At Udaya studio.

Randor Guy: In Alleppey, started by our friend Kunchacko!

**Janakiram** : Kunchacko and Koshy.

Randor Guy: K and K Productions.

**Janakiram** : *Kallan and Kullan* Productions!

Randor Guy: (laughs) The thief and the dwarf, was it? Koshy was supposed to be a better man, wasn't he?

**Janakiram** : A far better one. He was a lawyer. He wrote very well about me in the papers saying that if at all one wanted to learn from some director, Janakiram is the one.

Randor Guy: I believe K V Koshy has written a book, '*Ende Cinema Anubhavangal*', Have you heard of it? I read it recently for my research.

**Janakiram** : Can you get a copy? He wrote a good article about me in Malayala Manorama. R S Kurupp acted as a coolie in the film along with the hero and the hero was Trivikraman Nair. He was the Chief Engineer of Kottayam. A very good actor.

Randor Guy: But he never came into films again?

**Janakiram** : There was another film *Chandrika* where he acted.

Randor Guy: With V S Raghavan.

**Janakiram** : The ruling came disallowing government servants from working elsewhere.

Randor Guy: So he gave up films?

**Janakiram** : Yes, he gave up films and is now no more. There was a great stage artist by name Paramasivam Pillai...

Randor Guy: Was it Kumari's first film too?

**Janakiram** : No, *Vellinatchatram* was her first.

Randor Guy: I suppose she had a small role in that.

**Janakiram** : Yes, and for Omana it was her first film. I had booked her after seeing a couple of her snaps in a photo studio. Her maternal uncle was the commander of Malabar Police and he refused. But I went and...I lived with her for 13 years.

Randor Guy: Yes, I know. She had told me. When I was shooting my film *Moham*, she used to come with her daughter. She had an eccentric man as husband, a photographer who created problems for me.

**Janakiram** : Now she's suffering a lot.

Randor Guy: Then she used to narrate the story of her life to me.

**Janakiram** : Very well behaved and very rare, I must say.

Randor Guy: Yes, she was.

**Janakiram** : Had a Hindu name, though a Christian.

Randor Guy: Yes, a Syrian Christian.

**Janakiram** : We were tenants in the house of Kothamangalam Seenu and Mayavaram Paappa.

Randor Guy: Where?

**Janakiram** : In Mylapore. Some T N Koil street or Thengu Viswanathan... or some such name near Thanni Thotti market.

Randor Guy: Senkzhuneer Perumal Koil?

**Janakiram** : Tenganur Vinayagar Koil maybe...

Randor Guy: T S V Koil street?

**Janakiram** : Yes...

Randor Guy: Siddhi Vinayagar koil. That was famous there.

**Janakiram** : No, Thengu Viswanathan koil or...the rent was some twenty rupees.

Randor Guy: Who was the music director for *Sashidharan*? Was it Kalinga Rao?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Next I took Chechi. In that I introduced G K Venkatesh as music director.

Randor Guy: That was his first film?

**Janakiram** : He was a veena player with S V Venkatraman.

Randor Guy: G K Venkatesh was a veena player, was he?

**Janakiram** : A very good one. The kind of nuances Chitti Babu used to show in his Veena, Venkatesh showed way before. I booked him after seeing him perform at an

exhibition in Bangalore. For some years he used to say I was his Guru, but now though, Janakiram is completely dead for him.

Randor Guy: (laughs) It happens.

Randor Guy: I met this Kalinga Rao under curious circumstances. In the 70s when I was going somewhere for the shoot of my film, due to some mistake of the Railways, we both had the same berth. He was quite old then and he had that Mohan Kumari and Sohan Kumari also travelling with him.

**Janakiram** : He went to ruin because of them. Otherwise...

Randor Guy: Seeing my name, he found it familiar and asked me who I was. When he learnt about me, he said he had been in movies way before I was even born and gave me his name. I wondered if he was a singer who had sung the songs that I used to sing as a student and mentioned the songs. He indeed was! We shook hands on that and I gave the berth to him and took the upper berth.

**Janakiram** : He had a great voice.

Randor Guy: From then on, we became friends and I used to visit him. That Mohan Kumari wanted to act in films but she had become old.

**Janakiram** : They were not good, wherever they went, they quarreled. In M V Rajamma's movie...

Randor Guy: *Radha Ramana*?

**Janakiram** : That Mohan Kumari...is of a venomous type. Sohan Kumari was better. In looks she'd be beautiful, but in nature very villainous. In *Mahananda* too originally we had engaged Mohan Kumari as the heroine but because of the highhandedness, she was dropped. They wanted me to go for a compromise, but I flatly refused. They

thought I'd surrender and yield. But when I stuck to my stand and took on another girl as the heroine...

Randor Guy: That was Kantha?

**Janakiram** : Yes, she came back asking to be taken. I retorted she had already ruined Rajamma and now what was the guarantee that she wouldn't do the same to me? Despite the friendship between us and Kalinga Rao if she could behave in an unfriendly way...

Randor Guy: Lucky that I didn't take her in.

**Janakiram** : Very venomous.

Randor Guy: I think that man drank himself to death. (Laughs)

**Janakiram** : Yes. He was a good man but till the end they used to poison him.

Randor Guy: This *Sashidharan*, was it a success?

**Janakiram** : One of the greatest successes. Made enormous money but I was cheated. I was called and told the story and was asked to film it. But the same story, on stage was being performed by Vaikom Vasudeva Nair and Thangamma. They had done more than 200 shows. So he was to be the hero and she the heroine. But I could not agree. He was around 50 years and so was she. And she was a huge woman. He was a good singer too. But the story was that the heroine was a college girl who was getting abducted by the villain and has to be rescued by the hero. I could not envisage them playing the film's lead pair. Objections were raised against my stand and they even attempted my murder...efforts were made. I had a narrow escape. That was a story by itself.

Randor Guy: Because of this!

**Janakiram** : By now, Vasudevan Nair and others had spent a huge sum of money and only 11000 rupees was remaining. I challenged them that I would complete the film within that amount. First I shot some comedy scenes.

Randor Guy: Who was the comedian?

**Janakiram** : M P Chellappa Nair himself. He was a First Class Magistrate. He didn't allow us to change the story. I used to travel to Kottayam by boat and return by bus.

Randor Guy: Just so you can observe the common man's mannerisms...

**Janakiram** : But my partner didn't like it and insisted that I should travel by car. I used to overhear people talking about movies. Once I heard two learned professors saying that they have to carry a dictionary to understand the dialogues.

Randor Guy: Oh, because it was highbrow?

**Janakiram** : But Chellappa Nair was highly placed and wouldn't agree for anything. Once for a particular scene where he was trying to escape being chased by an Alsatian dog, he wanted to be seen as sitting on top of a stool on top of a table! I tried to reason with him saying it's not possible to believe that one would manage to place a stool on a table and climb on that while being chased by a dog. But no, he would not budge. And others didn't have the courage to tell him as he was a powerful man owning a fleet of buses and one needed to commute by buses every day. Then Vikraman Nair and R S Kurupp backed me and re-wrote the story in a common colloquial way. (Speaks in Malayalam). Then it became a great hit. So much so. If I boarded the train at Cochin, before reaching the next station, people would surround me and hail me as Shantaram's brother Janakiram!'

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : They would garland me and at every station, gift me apples and pine apples till I reach Trichur.

Randor Guy: You became very popular in Kerala. Then I had engaged Kaviyur Revamma to sing all the songs. That song in Bhairavi became a huge hit. She herself used to sing that song with the tampura. That song comes just a little before the interval.

Randor Guy: You mean she acted in the movie?

**Janakiram** : Yes, as the heroine's friend. The heroine, the estate owner's daughter comes to the balcony and the hero who is a coolie. is watering the plants in the garden and she sees him when the song plays. *Maaran Sukumaaran...*She teaches musicology in America now.

Randor Guy: Revamma is not here now?

**Janakiram** : No. She had married the owner of a Malabar Hotel. Don't know what happened later. But she gave more than 100 records and this was the first one.

Randor Guy: She was a popular singer those days.

**Janakiram** : She sang the songs of Narayana Guru. That time my sister got married in Mysore and they all came. For the entire picture I had paid her Rs500. She didn't want it even. Later they came to Bangalore and gifted me things worth some 1000 rupees- like chips, *paani*, a honey-like thing that comes from the palm tree.

02:16:42-02:21:55

Randor Guy: Your second film in Malayalam was *Chechi*. Was it a novel or...?

**Janakiram** : I dubbed it in Tamil as *Nadigai*. It was again a story by Chellappa Nair, but I changed the story. The story is that of an actress whom everybody expects to

entertain them; but when the question of her marriage arises, everyone backs out.

And Kumari gives a nice speech about this hypocrisy in the end.

Rando Guy: Who were the artists?

**Janakiram** : Vasudevan Nair was there but I don't remember his status. Vaikom Mani, Kumari and Omana were there.

Rando Guy: Vaikom Mani's son-in-law is Sri Kumaran Thampi who's a Malayalam writer, producer and director.

**Janakiram** : At Udaya studios *Nallathanga* was being made and Augustine Joseph was the hero.

Rando Guy: The father of Yesudas.

**Janakiram** : Yes and Omana was playing the second wife. And Yesudas then was a seven-year-old boy who'd come to the sets at times. Once while the shooting was on, I was called and they sent a car for me from Alleppey and I went. A German was the film's cameraman, I forget his name...

Rando Guy: Bayers?

**Janakiram** : Some such name. He had taken sick and they wanted me to step in as the camera man but I felt it was not right. But they somehow convinced me by saying the German was fine with the alternate arrangement and Koshy also insisted. And Krishna Iyer was there.

Rando Guy: P V Krishna Iyer.

**Janakiram** : He was a venomous type of man and I worked for him.

Rando Guy: You worked for *Nallathanga* as camera man?

**Janakiram :** Just for one part for three days. One day the sky was overcast and it was felt shooting can't be done. But I assured it could be done, but Krishna Iyer wanted to cancel the shoot. I used the five-zero watt light as the main light that gave a soft low light like a natural filler and I used it as the main light and shot. They were doubtful of the outcome, but I got it developed, enlarged it and showed them. Everyone appreciated but Krishna Iyer trashed it. But I argued that it was the right way of shooting that particular shot. Yesudas used to be very excited seeing the camera then. Later for a movie of mine, Yesudas's father sang for free.

Randor Guy: Who were the other artists in *Chechi*? Was Omana in it?

**Janakiram :** Yes and younger sister was Kumari. No one is ready to marry as she's an artist. Kumari gives a very good speech.

Randor Guy: Who was the hero?

**Janakiram :** I can't seem to remember...it's one of the three...Vaikom Mani and...Kottarakkara was there...

Randor Guy: I'll check, I have a directory. And was Kalinga Rao again the music director?

**Janakiram :** No, G K Venkatesh. His first film.

Randor Guy: And you cranked the film and it was made at Udaya? And how was the reception?

**Janakiram :** Not so good as compared to *Sashidharan*.

Randor Guy: What was the reason, they didn't like the theme?

**Janakiram :** Must have been that, otherwise everything was fine, the photography...

Randor Guy: Can you tell us something about this Kumari? She was one of the popular heroines of early Malayalam cinema.

**Janakiram** : Not a matter that can be discussed, I have been witness to things...but finally it was a murder.

Randor Guy: She's supposed to have committed suicide...

**Janakiram** : No, no. I can tell you off the record.

02:21:56-02:40:25

Randor Guy: You worked at Udaya Studios in Allappey which was started by Kunchacko who went onto become a very big producer. How big was this studio? Very big?

**Janakiram** : Not at all. It had a portable recording equipment Wizarto. It was used in the wartime to record the bombardments.

Randor Guy: So it was a military recording equipment? Did you buy it at some auction? What about the camera?

**Janakiram** : It was an old Mitchell camera.

Randor Guy: How many floors did they have?

**Janakiram** : Just one floor and an office. That too thatched.

Randor Guy: What about the lab?

**Janakiram** : I created a room upstairs within that shed by my own method for the very first time. It created some jealousy.

Randor Guy: Did it have its own lab?

**Janakiram** : Yes.

Randor Guy: K B Koshy and Kunchacko were partners? K and K?

**Janakiram** : Yes.

Randor Guy: K and K productions...

**Janakiram** : They were partners only in the production, not in the studio. They took *Vellinatchatram* and *Nallathanga*.

Randor Guy: After *Chechi*, did you make any more Malayalam pictures?

**Janakiram** : It was dubbed in Tamil as *Nadigai*.

Randor Guy: How did it fare in Tamil?

**Janakiram** : Not so well, but we got back the money. In Malayalam I must say it was a failure.

Randor Guy: In Tamil, it did better.

**Janakiram** : They asked whether the same Janakiram who did *Sashidharan* did this too!

Randor Guy: After that did you stay on there or return to Madras?

**Janakiram** : After that I started *Kannin Manigal*.

Randor Guy: You didn't do any film in between?

**Janakiram** : I started *Kannin Manigal* in 1952.

Randor Guy: When was *Chechi*?

**Janakiram** : Way before that.

Randor Guy: You didn't do anything in the interim period?

**Janakiram** : It was just a gap of one or two years. I was preparing for this *Kannin Manigal*. I got into direction. Sundaram called me for *Thirumbi Paar*.

Randor Guy: Modern Theatres. T R Sundaram.

**Janakiram :** Kodak Ramamurthy had recommended me. I was called to their Woods Road office to sign the agreement. There was no fixed amount for directors then. I never demanded my fee and told him he can leave the fee space blank and fill it up after I sign and not show me at all. But I had heard about Sundaram beating up people and therefore I demanded that I be treated with respect on the sets; after all, he had made many movies and surely was better-informed; mistakes were bound to happen, but if he found any mistake, he must call me to the room and tell me. He laughed and wondered why I was saying all that. I said I was trained by Dungan and that on the set I must be the master. But he gave me full freedom.

Randor Guy: I didn't know that you worked in *Thirumbi Paar*.

**Janakiram :** That's a sad story. I went to Salem and had started work on that and I was given quarters too. I started working with Harini.

Randor Guy: And not Krishna Kumari?

(Recording interrupted and resumes)

Randor Guy: You went to Salem to do *Thirumbi Paar* for T R Sundaram. You were the director. And you started work with Harini and Sivaji Ganesan. Krishna Kumari replaced Harini later. Had you taken some reels with Harini?

**Janakiram :** Yes. With the same set, it was shot again with Krishna Kumari.

Randor Guy: Why was Harini replaced?

**Janakiram :** They had their own reasons. In Modern Theatres, things are not discussed openly. Like a dictatorship. There were some other reasons...

Randor Guy: Unmentionable reasons. So Krishna Kumari replaced her. Did you direct scenes with Krishna Kumari too?

**Janakiram :** I brought about some changes in her dress too. She used to sweat a lot and the sweat patches will show on the sleeves and it was not at all nice, I suggested that a banian be worn inside and that material will absorb the sweat and it won't show. Even now that is followed by many. And she was quite hairy, but hair-removing creams were not skin-friendly and so I advised that the hair be plucked out with some tolerance. Pandari Bai was the sister. The main tiff was between me and Karunanidhi...

Randor Guy: Was Karunanidhi coming to the sets?

**Janakiram :** The subject was *Poomaalai*, not *Thirumbi Paar*.

Randor Guy: A different subject and a story?

**Janakiram :** The same story but a different title. I objected to the title *Poomaalai* as it had no relevance to the story. It was just the name of the sister's character. The hero is a womanizer and keeps seducing women. I commented how it was the same story as that of Arunagirinathar. That comment got Karunanidhi irritated. He made a fuss saying the country was going to ruins thanks to such *puranic* stories! I reasoned saying what was important was the essence of his life and not whether such a man existed or not. It's the story of a man who was a rake, eventually...

Randor Guy: Corrected by the sister.

**Janakiram :** So I suggested the title, *Thirumbi Paar*. That again was rejected by him. He said rogues will have a field day calling out to girls on the street, Thirumbi Paar (turn and look back)! I re-counted the movie *Savukkadi Chandrakantha* where women are categorized and the fake monk is asked, "*Sawmigaal*, which girl is your preference- Gujrathi, Brahmin or..." and said such things do happen but as far as this

title *Thirumbi Paar* ( turn and look back)was concerned, the emphasis was on the need to look back on one's life and learn the life's lessons- how many women have you ruined, look back! How many lives have you trod upon, look back! Such was the impact everyone liked it. It created jealousy amongst some like Suleiman the manager...

Randor Guy: Yes, I know...Padma Films.

**Janakiram** : And Kaakka Shanmugam...they were all the villains. The news of my argument reached Sundaram and I was called into his room. As I approached the door of his room a chair was brought in for me to sit. This again was reason enough for jealousy as they all had been standing with folded hands for more than an hour. I wondered if they had ever been Beat Constables as they were standing for some two hours! I told them they too could ask for chairs or benches to sit citing discomfort and without having to raise slogans on 'labour welfare' to get things done. This again didn't go down well with them. Then there was the time when the song '*pozhudhu vidindhaal thirumanam*' had to be shot, but the choreographer was not there.

Randor Guy: A very fine tune it was!

**Janakiram** : And I offered to choreograph it myself and asked that everyone should leave the set but for Krishnakumari on whom it was picturized. They agreed. It was picturized near a pond and I envisioned the dance with reasonable camera movements and camera placements, but Subbarao the camera man didn't like it and he created a ruckus that such camera movements will take up too much time for proper lighting and that many shots. In Modern Theatres it was quite common to hear of insiders writing anonymous letters to the Chief carrying tales about others. So the

news reached Sundaram that I was having an argument with the camera man and he sent for me to know what all the fuss was about. I explained to him the whole scene and told him to see the rushes and then decide for himself; I also told him if the scene had to be reshot, the cost could be cut from my remuneration. The next day Sundaram himself came to the set while I was trying to convince the hero Shivaji about jumping from some height which he was not comfortable with. Sundaram just observed everything, said nothing then but sent for me later. He asked why I was arguing with the hero. I told him how I had envisioned the scene and conceded I didn't know of a better way to do the scene. He suggested an easier way of shooting that scene and I agreed it indeed was good. In this way things were going on. One day there was an advertisement for the film in the paper *Dina Thanthi* and I found Sundaram's name mentioned as the director and that was totally unacceptable. I could not take any more of it and decided to leave. I was staying in the quarters given by them and I packed my belongings and got a taxi to wait for me. I went to Suleiman who was the manager and bluffed that I had to leave urgently as my uncle wasn't keeping well and that I needed some money as well. He first told me to take permission from Mr Sundaram but later agreed to give me money which he said wasn't anything much.

...please switch off the recorder...

(Recording interrupted and resumes)

02:40:26-02:46:54

Randor Guy: So, you gave up *Thirumbi Paar* almost towards the end of the picture.

**Janakiram** : Kodak Srinivasan was at his office on Woods Road office here and everything like signing the agreement, receiving money was done here.

Randor Guy: Yes, Bell Pictures. Kodak Srinivasan has a son by name Lakshmanan who works in a bank. He's a close friend of mine. I knew Kodak Srinivasan very well.

**Janakiram** : I had a strong case against them because the advertisement had come out in the papers, but I was deeply hurt and had lost my name and suffered much despite working on the subject so much. Karunanidhi was very much aware of it. Anyway, it all got over.

Randor Guy: Didn't Sundaram try to stop you from leaving, call you again or write to you?

**Janakiram** : No. They approached me through Ramamurthy but I was firm in not going back. As it is, one gets kicked around there; more so now, after all these happenings... one certainly can't expect any respect. So I decided once and for all. Later a send-off was arranged for Stunt Srinivasan...

Randor Guy: I know, he was in the censors...

**Janakiram** : Yes. For that Sundaram had also come. There he asked me to meet him at Hotel Woodlands the next day and I went to meet. In the room tiffin was ordered for both and we ate in silence and no conversation took place. He smoked some 10 cigarettes one after the other in silence.

Randor Guy: He'd smoke just half the cigarette?

**Janakiram** : No, just one third. The rest he'd just crush with his hands and throw. He had some such quirk. Like that, he's smoke 4 to 5 packets in a day. He'd smoke a costly brand...

Randor Guy: Honey Dew?

**Janakiram** : No, Imperial Special.

Randor Guy: Oh, that was the costliest cigarette of those days! I suppose he could afford it!

**Janakiram** : His wife was an English lady... he went on and on with his smoking, feeling awkward about how to broach the topic. Then I decided to broach the topic myself and took his permission to say something. He asked me to go on. I said, "Sir! You are quite elder to me, suppose you had a son of my age and whatever happened to me at Modern Theatres of which there's no need to tell in detail- if that had happened to him and he had come to you and reported, what would be your judgement?" He smiled and said, "All right Janakiram, shouldn't have happened, please forget it". That was enough for me, not that I wanted him to fall at my feet and I said, "It's alright, Sir". And he asked, "What are you doing now?". I replied, " My name is sullied now and I have earned a bad reputation that I can't work with anybody, I don't co-operate with anybody. That (inaudible) Mudaliar of Alleppey wanted me to direct a film but hearing the rumours, he backed out, I don't know what to do about it". And he told me to meet Ramamurthy the next day. I wanted to know why but he just said, "You are his friend, why don't you meet him as a friend?" There was one Soundar Rajan with Sundaram. In Modern Theatres they had a practice - if they are making a film say A, it would be sold to B for Rs 20, 000 and then to C for 25,000 and so on till Z- by which time it'd be for Rs.100,000. There will be many tables for them in the office and each one seated at the table would be a proprietor of his company. In this fashion, money would be raised but each one of them would be a producer just in name and buy out one another. All this was to evade income tax. Soundar Rajan's was one such company and on learning that I was planning to self-finance a film of my own story

*Kannin Manigal*, he sent Rs.25000 through him. I started *Kannin Manigal* with that money. And I was asked to sign an agreement to sell the rights of the movie for Salem district.

Randor Guy: Did you go to see Ramamurthy the next day?

**Janakiram** : Yes, All this happened through Ramamurthy. And he advised me. Ours is an unbroken friendship of 40 years. He was staying at a place on Harris Road for a rent of Rs 30.

Randor Guy: Wasn't he a typist?

**Janakiram** : He was the typist at Kodak. There was one Helicott...

Randor Guy: He died recently.

**Janakiram** : You mean, Ramamurthy?

Randor Guy: No, I meant Helicott.

**Janakiram** : I met him in London. He was fond of fishing. On Sundays he'd go away to fish. Once he had clicked a fine picture of a school of fish gathered to eat little pieces of coconuts and I sent that picture across to him with the message, "Wish you many more fishes for this year!"

02:46:55-02:53:28

Randor Guy: So, you got money from Modern Theatres...

**Janakiram** : Yes and I started this with that money.

Randor Guy: But he didn't ask you to work for him again?

**Janakiram** : No. I myself had told him that I didn't wish to work with anybody.

**Janakiram** : Then Padmini, M V Rajamma everyone co-operated.

Randor Guy: And this *Anbu* that you were talking about was ultimately directed by Natesan himself? What happened to it?

**Janakiram** : The film's heroine Rajakumari...

Randor Guy: She played the mother...

**Janakiram** : I had known her from the time of her debut *Kacha Devyani, Kumara Kulothungan*. I used to call her Rajaayi...

Randor Guy: That was her original name.

**Janakiram** : And she used to call me Johny. To be frank, there was an affair...can you...

Randor Guy: You want the recording off?

Recording is stopped and resumes.

Randor Guy: You were working on *Anbu*...

**Janakiram** : You know about Natesan's qualification...

Randor Guy: He was only a tailor.

**Janakiram** : Yes and did not know anything. There was a camera assistant by name Shirod Vohra, an Assamese and a fine one. They all used to hate Natesan and make fun of him as a tailor. The shooting was in Citadel. He started addressing me as Johny and I didn't like it. I went back to Ramamurthy and told, "Either he should have been an old friend or older than me. But it's neither, so why should I take it?" I told him to come to the set and see for himself and he too came. And Natesan was interfering every now and then and I couldn't take it anymore and told him to manage the camera himself and left.

Randor Guy: (laughs). He was a man with no culture. After *Anbu* was released, there was a review of *Anbu* in *Kumudham*. For the first time the magazine had introduced

an innovative way of review, which later on other magazines too followed- it was as if the artists were candidly reviewing their own role in the movie themselves after seeing the movie; like Padmini chiding herself for acting in such a movie and such. He filed a defamation suit against Kumudham. The magazine's lawyer was V C Gopal Rathnam and I was then a law student. He lost the case and the magazine was determined to fight the case till the end. His contention was that the artists won't speak like that. Gopal Rathnam argued that he was being silly, not understanding it was an imaginary review anyway, a different style of writing. That was the time I met Natesan. I found him to be lacking in culture.

**Janakiram :** There were tiffs many times. The day Ramamurthy came and observed, he agreed with me and told Natesan, "What you are doing is not right. Because you requested me, at my behest Janakiram agreed to work without asking for credits and you don't know his expertise. It's not right that you interfere like this". And moreover, I had once shared an English joke with Vohra and others and they got reminded of it on the set and laughed and that too angered him. They all were angry with me for allowing him to see the camera angle that I set. They felt his job was only to tell me the shot. He was having an affair with one Padma and she was acting in the film too and he'd interfere and wish to have his way in lens-setting in every scene involving her. Arguments happened and I told him to find somebody else and quit.

Randor Guy: (laughs) Reminds me of an incident that U Rajagopal shared with me about Chakrapani. ( Speaks in Telugu)

**Janakiram :** I remember one more joke involving B N R Rao.

Randor Guy: *Meerabai...*

**Janakiram** : It was about the size of the lens which was 6 inches. He wanted something bigger and I cracked a joke which didn't go down well with him and he refused to talk to me. They didn't know the basics...

02:53:29-02:57:04

Randor Guy: How well did you know Ellis R Dungan? How did you get his contact?

**Janakiram** : That's a good point. He directed the movie *Kavi Kalamegam*.

Randor Guy: Featuring Rajarathnam and S P L Dhanalakshmi.

**Janakiram** : Rajarathnam used to sing too very well and Dhanalakshmi was the heroine. Her sister by name Damayanthi too...

Randor Guy: I know, Kuchala Kumari's mother.

**Janakiram** : Yes. We all were on set working and Dungan liked me as I was the only one whom he could converse with in English and also discuss the angles, suggestions and compositions as he was a camera man himself. He taught me but also gave me many things. He presented me with a graduated (inaudible) which nobody had those days. He worked with Moilon and Moilon took me...

Randor Guy: Yes, they both worked together. I'm in touch with Dungan as I'm doing a book on him.

**Janakiram** : He took the movie *Jungle*. He's not an American, he's a Canadian.

Randor Guy: He's of Irish origin actually.

**Janakiram** : So is Moilon.

Randor Guy: Once a month he sends me recorded tapes of his speech. As of now, in the recordings, he has just reached India at the invitation of M L Tandon to work for his studios; but only when he reaches Bombay do they realize...

**Janakiram** : (Inaudible), have you noticed?

Randor Guy: I have not seen him, I know him only through the tapes.

**Janakiram** : I'll tell you a good joke. We were shooting a war documentary at Ozhungu Malai opposite the airport. Kamal Ghosh was manning one camera and I the other. The shot was that of two canons firing at the command of the Commanding Officer saying, "Fire!" The cameras were all set but just at the nick of the time there was some crowd movement and we held back. Power had to be switched on to get started and Dungan said, 'Power' in his accent.

Recording is stopped and resumes.

**02:57:05-03:04:19**

Randor Guy: Yesterday, we stopped just before *Kannin Manigal*, your experiences in *Thirumbi Paar*. We were talking about Ellis R Dungan, I'm doing a book on him as I told, how did you come to know him?

**Janakiram** : As I said, he was doing *Kavi Kalamegam* with Rajarathnam and S P L Dhanalakshmi and I was one of the camera assistants. Those days I was the only educated man who could speak to him in English and also well-dressed because I came from Bangalore. Always in suit and tie and felt at times everyone was mocking me.

Randor Guy: Did you work with him on any of his pictures?

**Janakiram** : The war documentary I mentioned yesterday. It was by him and Moilon. I was one and Barclay was the other camera man.

Randor Guy: He speaks of a war propaganda film that he made titled, *Returning Soldiers*. I have a still of that film in which T S Balaiyah acted. Do you anything about it?

**Janakiram** : No, by that time I went away to Mysore. We made 4 war documentaries then.

Randor Guy: He said it was a war propaganda film and he has sent some stills showing Balaiyah as the hero and that they had filmed on the sea front, sea shore and all.

**Janakiram** : I don't know.

Randor Guy: We spoke about *Matrubhumi* for a short while yesterday. It was directed by H M Reddi and T V Kumudhini played the heroine and Santanam the stage actor, the hero.

**Janakiram** : P U Chinnappa...

Randor Guy: Yes. Were you involved in its making?

**Janakiram** : Involved in the sense, I was one of the assistants.

Randor Guy: Was it made at MPPC?

**Janakiram** : No, Vale Pictures. The whole family was there. ALRM Chettiyar was the producer.

Randor Guy: One who made *Pavala Kodi*. He was the producer?

**Janakiram** : Yes. It was the first picture to cost more than three lacs.

Randor Guy: Why was the cost so high?

**Janakiram** : They had the money. To be frank, H M Reddi exhausted them and he had his own book. Ramchandra Rao, father of Y R Samy was editor. The shots were taken

in such a manner that you could edit only if you could refer the book and not otherwise. So much of mismatch and very badly edited. When I saw the picture I could straight away say so. It was taken so well. Embar Aiyah had erected a beautiful set of the fort at Vale Pictures and (inaudible) of Fort St. George used to come and take pictures of that. He had a special technique.

Randor Guy: Was it some kind of a historical?

**Janakiram** : It was. There was an old drama company called A K Rao or so. Rajalakshmi was the heroine.

Randor Guy: Santanam too was a stage actor.

**Janakiram** : Of course, he was the hero. Kumudhini was brought in. She was a music teacher from Trivandrum.

**Janakiram** : Not in Trivandrum.

Randor Guy: She was from Trivandrum, but teaching music in Madurai. Her native was Trivandrum.

**Janakiram** : Venkatesa Iyer was her husband.

Randor Guy: I've seen him. He was a sick man when I saw him years later. Tall and...

**Janakiram** : There were lots of problems. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar wanted to have her. Kumudhini was a very brilliant artist. A brahmin girl, she had learnt horse-riding, sword-fighting and all. In the last shot she had to be tied and dragged by a horse. They suggested to have a dummy in her place but she refused and was firm in doing it herself. That was the last shot.

Randor Guy: Was Cooper the camera man? She told me he was one of the camera men.

**Janakiram** : He was the main, later on who came in...

Randor Guy: Then what happened with Thyagaraja Bhagavathar? She acted with him in *Ashok Kumar*.

**Janakiram** : After this, she was booked there. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar wanted to have an affair with her. He had a car called (Inaudible) which he'd take to Trichy. I decide to accompany him just like that and I was dissuaded for obvious reasons...

Randor Guy: (Laughs) The unwanted man...

**Janakiram** : She had been booked earlier for some film by Nandlal...

Randor Guy: *Chaaya* with MGR, but it didn't take off. They abandoned it half way.

**Janakiram** : She was given a good role to begin with, it developed well but was given to somebody else in the end.

Randor Guy: You mean in *Ashok Kumar*?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Her role was given away to Kannaamba.

Randor Guy: she had told me that she was to do the step-mother's role, but that something happened later and it was given to Kannaamba who learnt dancing for the song *Unai Kandhu mayangaada*.

**Janakiram** : She was stabbed, so to say.

Randor Guy: She didn't quite make it as much as she was supposed to.

**Janakiram** : Kumudhini had a Brahminical accent to her speech which she couldn't quite correct, no matter how much she tried.

Randor Guy: That's a problem many artists have. I've seen that in my films as well.

**Janakiram** : Kumudhini and I were like one family. Her mother would serve food for me. I wasn't a non-brahmin for them nor were they brahmin for me. She was a very well-behaved artist.

Randor Guy: She lives in Hyderabad, but right now she's here and I'm trying to do a programme with her like this.

**Janakiram** : She doesn't have children of her own but brought up her brother's son as her own. He's a (inaudible) named Chandru.

Randor Guy: He's in Hyderabad now. She's living with him, trying to help him there.

03:04:20-03:11:57

Randor Guy: This *Matrubhumi* was written by D V Chari who was a famous dialogue-writer. Did you know him?

**Janakiram** : Very well. Like I told you, there were very few people with whom one could move freely and I was close but not too close.

Randor Guy: Was he a talented writer?

**Janakiram** : Very much. There was a popular dialogue in *Matrubhumi* about *Anbu* (affection).

Randor Guy: What happened to him afterwards? He seems to have faded away....

**Janakiram** : He fell sick I suppose. From Srivilliputhur...

Randor Guy: You are right. He was from Srivilliputhur.

**Janakiram** : Were very close. There was one more man called Dorai. He was not talented but...

Randor Guy: A 'Yes Man'.

Randor Guy: Kumudhini told me that in *Matrubhumi*, she sang a song *Namadhu Janma Bhumi*. She has a record of that which she promised to play when I record her interview.

**Janakiram** : I now recall an incident. You can check with her too. She was to sing a song *Annaiyin Kaalil Vilangugalo* that shows Bharat Mata in fetters. The scene had a photo of Bharat Mata and the camera was placed in position and all that. But suddenly she broke down and started sobbing uncontrollably.

Randor Guy: Kumudhini started crying?

**Janakiram** : Yes, you can ask her.

Randor Guy: I will.

**Janakiram** : We were put up in a nearby place with two rooms and I even remember that my stomach was aching because of appendicitis. I asked why at all she wept so much. She said she remembered the time her father had died and the memory of the rituals all came rushing and that she could not help but cry.

Randor Guy: So she cried indeed! That movie was supposed to have the theme of independence, the freedom movement...? Supposed to be a historical?

**Janakiram** : Had it been true to history, the film would have been banned.

Randor Guy: Banned because it was anti- British?

**Janakiram** : Yes. So it was just mentioned as some foreigner. P U Chinnappa had a very good role and he was a great artist. There used to be two rooms and he and I stayed in opposite rooms. Very talented man and he used to sing.

Randor Guy: Yes and he used to do the stunts himself.

**Janakiram :** There was a Malayali called Stunt Madhavan who used to teach him and Kumudhini the stunts. He would say, 'You hit me anywhere...(inaudible)'.

Randor Guy: He was so good in fencing?

**Janakiram :** Fencing and sword fighting. Chinnappa and Kumudhini both took pains to learn from him.

Randor Guy: On the walls of her home on Royapettah High Road, the snaps of her seated on a horse with sword and all that are there as keepsakes. Was it a box office success?

**Janakiram :** No, because it could not be edited properly.

Randor Guy: But she told me it was.

**Janakiram :** They gave it big publicity and all but...

Randor Guy: Not a success.

**Janakiram :** Chettiyar lost heavily.

Randor Guy: ALRM Lost heavily? It cost three lacs!

**Janakiram :** More than three lacs.

Randor Guy: Must have been an expensive production for those days.

**Janakiram :** Embar Aiyah had erected such authentic durbar like set with thrones and such, Like Alexander's...nobody could have done like it.

Randor Guy: Embar Aiyah was the art director.

**Janakiram :** I was mad after collecting photographs from Illustrated Weekly and Life...

Randor Guy: Yes, the American magazine.

**Janakiram :** The photographs were given there.

Randor Guy: True to Greek style and culture. Can you say something about H M Reddy, one of the pioneers of South Indian cinema?

**Janakiram** : He got a name from that picture of Kanchanamala...what was that?

Randor Guy: *Gruhalakshmi*?

**Janakiram** : Yes. How I got involved in it was due to my speaking Kannada being an attraction for him.

Randor Guy: Because he was from that area?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Muni Venkata Reddy was the name.

Randor Guy: I was told it was Hanuvappa Muniappa Reddy.

**Janakiram** : Yes, some such... In Bangalore we've got our gardens Bangalore Gardens in Yellalanka and his father Muniappa was what you call *Pattedar* of that area.

Randor Guy: So this man H M Reddy was Hanuvappa?

**Janakiram** : This much I know, but how he got 'Reddy', I don't know.

Randor Guy: There are some Reddys sitting there, not knowing Telugu but speaking Kannada.

**Janakiram** : You can hear three or four languages spoken in H M Reddy's household.

Randor Guy: B N Reddy told me. I believe his wife was a Marathi.

**Janakiram** : Yes, and the wife's brother was Ramachandra Rao. And there was Baburao the editor who was a Telugu.

Randor Guy: He was another relative?

**Janakiram** : Yes. It was quite confusing to know who's who. For some time they were staying behind Gemini here. A big family. What they call *Dildar*...he had such a personality.

Randor Guy: I have seen him in his old age, I didn't know him. I've seen photos...

**Janakiram** : In his younger days, he had a moustache, a good voice and a commanding presence... Once a quarrel broke out between him and the G O about whom to engage as actor and such, in Vale Pictures.

Randor Guy: That was made at Vale Pictures?

**03:11:58-03:47:21**

Randor Guy: After this *Thirumbi Paar* and *Anbu*, which you walked out of, you started your *Kannin Manigal*, you said. Tell me something more about it. It won some award...

**Janakiram** : Vasam was also very angry with me. I made the picture. Nobody had told me what to do. I had selected the story, I booked Padmini as the heroine and made the picture.

Randor Guy: What was the story about?

**Janakiram** : You know the novel Scarface? That was made in Hindi as *Jailor* by Sohrab Modi. The story goes thus: the man has a scar on his face and his wife elopes with a doctor but get caught in a fire accident where the doctor becomes blind. This man gets his wife back but tortures her as he's now a sadist...when Sohrab saw my picture, he said my picture was far better than his. In the story, Padmini plays a blind beggar whom he brings up with the hope of having her as his own someday but she falls in love with a beggar whom she had met earlier and he shoots himself in frustration. The beggar girls sings a song which repeats five times in the movie as the theme song. Because it's repeated many times over, it might sound monotonous. So, to

beat the monotony, the song was made into a *ragamalika*. M L Vasanthakumari sang that. It had three ragas- Tilang, Bhimplas and Sindhu Bhairavi.

Randor Guy: Who was the music director?

**Janakiram** : S V Venkatraman. I was getting royalty for a long time from Ceylon.

Randor Guy: What was that song like?

**Janakiram** : *Kandu kondaen naane kadhal ennavendru thane* sung by Moti and Balasaraswathi.

Randor Guy: T A Moti.

**Janakiram** : Another song was *Nalla Veenai Idhu* by M L Vasanthakumari. (sings). This song is heard by the hero, the doctor and the beggar girl at different times and stays in their memory. Once when the doctor who has lost his sight in the fire accident hums the tune later in the movie, Padmini wonders aloud what the song is all about. Then he recounts his life's story. Later when she becomes blind and is taken in by the police... N S Krishnan is the police man in the movie.

Randor Guy: Oh, N S Krishnan was I it?

Jankairam: N S Krishnan and Madhuram as well. He gives a good educational touch to the story. In fact, I had a hatred for N S Krishnan, only for one reason.

Randor Guy: Why?

**Janakiram** : Chari was directing *Mangamma Sabatham*.

Randor Guy: T G Raghavachari!

**Janakiram** : Ranjan and Vasundhara were engaged. And much later, N S Krishnan was brought in at the behest of Vasan. A small ruckus happened when the sentry didn't allow him in. That's another story. There was a scene involving Ranjan,

Vasundhara and N S Krishnan. And Raghavachari instructed N S Krishnan to act in a particular way. N S Krishnan told him bluntly, 'You restrict your instructions to those two, not to me'. Now, Raghavachari was an educated man and Krishnan was illiterate and this attitude didn't go down well with me. Anyway, I didn't like slapstick comedy at all. Amongst that group, I liked C S Durairaj's comedy. I didn't like that an educated man was treated with such an attitude.

Randor Guy: Did N S Krishnan really say that?

**Janakiram** : Yes, he did. He had a person by name Ramdas, who later on became the personal secretary of M G R. Once for my own film featuring N S Krishnan, this Ramdas came and started to discuss shot arrangements for scenes involving N S Krishnan. I asked, 'Pray, who are you?' He was taken aback and asked, 'Sir, don't you know me?' I replied, 'I do know who you are, but tell me, what's your role in this film's production?' This interaction was promptly reported to N S Krishnan. Comments were heard that I was drunk and blabbering just because I wielded the camera. But then his graph was on the decline with some of his films flopping and so, the next day he spoke in a conciliatory tone to me and said he trusted me completely with his part and even presented me with a camera.

Randor Guy: He gave you?

**Janakiram** : Yes. There were two movies- *Padiththa Muttaal* and *Thottakkaaran*. You've heard of Thottakkaaran Viswanathan?

Randor Guy: Yes.

**Janakiram** : He wanted me to do that film.

Randor Guy: He wanted to produce?

**Janakiram** : I had booked M V Rajamma and she was under the control of Marudu Pillai. If one wished to get her dates for films, he'd talk of himself as free or not, as if he were Rajamma!

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : He wanted me to add a comedy track to my story but I wasn't interested. I had known M V Rajamma from the time of *Samsara Nouka*. It was shot in Vale Pictures only. She was a dignified artist and well behaved. That time I didn't have a place to stay and whenever I came down from Mysore, I'd stay at her place.

Randor Guy: Where was she staying?

**Janakiram** : In Alwarpet, in an independent house. This boy Ashwath was then a servant there. Today he is a big shot in Mysore.

Randor Guy: What's he doing now?

**Janakiram** : His daughter is well-off now, she runs a full orchestra. Has an uncouth figure, but he has made good money.

Randor Guy: We were talking of comedy and Marudu Pillai...

**Janakiram** : M V Rajamma had a Buick car and one day Marudu Pillai asked me to drop him at the railway station and on the way he suddenly decided to drop in on N S Krishnan. Once at his place, after some initial chit-chat, suddenly he sprang a surprise on me by telling him, ' Krishna, Janakiram has a good story, why don't you listen?' I was put in an embarrassing situation.

Randor Guy: You didn't expect it?

**Janakiram** : I was quite reluctant, but once I began to narrate, I got immersed in it.

Randor Guy: Which story did you narrate?

**Janakiram** : *Kannin Manigal.*

Randor Guy: Hadn't you made it already? Or, you hadn't started it yet?

**Janakiram** : No, only planning it and trying to get call-sheets. That was when he wanted me to book N S Krishnan. Once he heard the story, N S Krishnan was very much moved. He held my hands and said, 'Sir, in my entire career this is the first time I'm given a story narration. Usually, I'm at a loss to understand the story, but yours is such a beautiful story. Don't get me wrong...don't spoil your story by engaging me in it!'

Randor Guy: He said so himself?

**Janakiram** : 'My comedy will ruin the story', he said. 'Even while in jail, I used to have whiskey that cost three hundred rupees a bottle. Today I'm reduced to having the country hooch that costs three rupees. I don't know how much you'll pay me for my role. Even if you pay me five thousand rupees, I will still have fifty other debts to settle'. I was moved. I confessed to him that I had held a different opinion about him all along but now I was ready to let him have any role that he chose in that story. Again, he said, he'd gladly do any role I offered but still warned me not to risk taking him in. So, we developed the role of the policeman who helps the blind girl, like Padmini as the blind girl makes bamboo baskets and he helps her sell them.

Randor Guy: He acted as the constable?

**Janakiram** : Yes. We developed scenes around his character. There's a scene where Madharam playing his wife, is seen stitching clothes at home when he returns home late and he says, 'Today I happened to come across a blind beggar girl while on duty. There are so many beggars in the country, how nice it'd be if the rich households take

in just one beggar in their households, the nation will be rid of beggars! I suggested this idea to my boss and he liked it and so I left the blind girl at his place!'. To which Madhuras counters, 'Are you crazy? What if that girl is a cheat and robs things at his house, then what will you do?' He replies, 'Wow! How smart you are! I'm going to reward you. You know this room very well and you know where things are kept here. I'm going to blindfold you and you must fetch the things I ask you to'. Saying so, he blindfolds her and tells her to fetch the clock that's placed in a corner. While looking for it, she stumbles and keeps falling on chairs and bed. Kuladeivam Rajagopal also has a small role in that scene. That was his first picture. Krishnan recommended him and requested me to give him some role. I was worried he might ask for three or four hundred rupees. But he settled for just fifty rupees. The five thousand rupees that I had given to Krishnan, he had already distributed it, he was that generous a man. Anyway, at the end of it, Madhuras removes the blindfold saying she can't risk her bones in the bargain and not have anyone to cook for him. Removing the blindfold, she feels like she's looking at a new world! Then Krishnan makes her realize how difficult it'd be for one who's actually blind. Then the idea of eye donation is introduced in the conversation and Madhuras declares she's ready to donate her eyes after death. Krishnan says, just one person donating isn't enough and many won't come forward themselves, so the government should enforce an act that says 'a dead man's eyes are the state's property'. After the film release, two young men who were given death sentence donated their eyes as their last wish and the wish was carried out. This news came out with the caption, 'Saagaada Kangal'.

Randor Guy: 'Eyes that don't die'.

**Janakiram :** There was a magazine called Kaveri, in Kumbakonam.

Randor Guy: Yes, Chitra's...

**Janakiram :** They ran a story titled, 'Indha mara mandai Sarkar seyyuma?' ( Will the stupid Government comply?). The content was that films of Shantaram and K A Abbas were getting refunds of the entertainment tax levied; while they were great films and fully deserving of it, Janakiram's picture deserved to be not just financed but also promoted by the Government. So, will the government comply? And the paper *Hindu* that never ran film reviews, made an exception and for the first time wrote a review for my film which said, ' A picture to be produced after 20 years, there' so much advanced technique!'.

Randor Guy: When was *Kannin Manigal* made?

**Janakiram :** 1952 I started it, completed in 1956.

Randor Guy: It took four years in production.

**Janakiram :** I had to prepare, get artists on board, and money was tight. Shot a few comedy scenes of Muthulakshmi and Karunanidhi, showed it around to get more finance and so on.

Randor Guy: How much did that film cost you? It was a black & white film.

**Janakiram :** Yes. Not more than four to five lacs.

Randor Guy: How did it fare at the box office?

**Janakiram :** Not a success as you'd expect ...

Randor Guy: Like gate-crashing...

**Janakiram :** It gave me enough money to make another movie.

Randor Guy: Did it win any awards, appreciation?

**Janakiram** : That's what Vasam blasted me about... It was nominated by the government. I didn't know of it. One fine day I received a message that I should send the film's copy to Gemini's Projection room for the award committee to view the movie. There were rules that the producer of the movie should not be seen hanging around anywhere near the projection room and so I just sent the film for screening and stayed out. It so happened that two people with their own vested interests were there inside the room-one B N Gupta and the distributors for the film *Amara Deepam*... Thangavelu acted in it.

Randor Guy: Yes, Sivaji Ganesan too.

**Janakiram** : And Padmini.

Randor Guy: T Prakash Rao's...

**Janakiram** : They were interested. Their picture got chosen over mine but the Central Committee rejected that film and a Bengali picture won the award. Had my picture been chosen, that would have been the first one to win the award in India. Once word got out, Vasam sent for me. After some casual chat, he enquired whether the film *Kannin Manigal* that was nominated and screened there, was mine. I nodded. He then asked what was I up to, when the film was being watched by the committee. He then explained, 'awards' need to be 'worked' on and how could I have been so naïve to think the award would come to me on a silver platter! He reminded me, 'When you left for Mysore, I warned you to be careful as you were a bad businessman though you were a good technician. You must have ignored it as a prattle from a brahmin; but you have proved me right!'

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram :** I said I was not allowed to be around and so stayed out, even though he had sent for me through Bindu Madhavan. He further said if rules prohibited me from being there with the committee, he could have managed Gupta and Sriramulu Naidu on my behalf! That's how I lost it as I didn't know to pull strings.

Randor Guy: To manipulate...

Jankairam: He scolded me for that. I could have won, as there wasn't any competition even at the all-India level. Because nobody had produced such a picture until then. Many doctors did not even know what Keratoplasty was. I dedicated the picture to Dr Muthaiya. A V Shetty of Chitra Talkies said the picture was great and that he hoped the producer made good money. To which I replied, even if I were to get ten lakhs rupees - that was a huge sum of money those days- it couldn't have given me more joy than hearing a man choosing to donate his eyes after seeing my movie. That would be the biggest reward for me. (Inaudible) was the woman who collected all the material for me. Once while returning from Singapore on a flight, I read about an American doctor by name (inaudible) who had first performed this operation. I was touched and made a trip to Russia to find out more. I met the doctor there who could speak only Russian and an interpreter from the Faculty of Foreign Languages was called in to help. I wanted to somehow incorporate this idea in to the story. So changed the story to say the jailor wills his eyes to the doctor who lost his eyes on his account before shooting himself. The story was well received, even by the worst critics.

Randor Guy: Who were the other artists apart from Padmini, N S Krishnan...M K Radha was the hero?

**Janakiram :** M K Radha was the main hero.

Randor Guy: He had left Gemini by that time.

**Janakiram** : Yes. I as young boy, knew of him when Radha was working in the drama company of his father Kandasamy Mudaliar. Once when we had gone to watch his drama, my mother forgot to bring my younger brother back home, leaving him behind. Realized he was missing only after reaching home.

Randor Guy: (laughs).

**Janakiram** : I had known him since then and on that strength, I had booked him. There was an incident...I used to go early for the shooting.

Randor Guy: Where was it shot?

**Janakiram** : At Vauhini. One morning when I reached early, Radha was already seated there and I sat before him. But he got up, turned his back on me, mumbling, 'In this damned company, no one cares to pay attention...'. Another time, M V Rajamma will endorse this...if he found any set property attractive like say this box... he'd ask one for himself. Same way, once we were shooting in Bangalore near a fish pond and there were lots of gold fish in the pond. I wished to feed the fish but didn't have any feed. Nearby some meat was available and when I asked for some to feed the fish, Radha asked if he could get some too! And M V Rajamma and others started to laugh.

Randor Guy: (laughs) So, he was muttering under his breath...

**Janakiram** : He was finding fault with everything. Those days there was some coffee called Tanjavur Degree Coffee, costing four annas a cup, which is what Padmini the heroine and he were given while an ordinary coffee was barely an anna per cup. I had an eighteen year old brahmin boy by name Kalyanam as my Production Manager. He was P T Paani Iyer's son. Just as I was readying the camera for a close-up

shot of Radha, this boy would come near and whisper in my ears that Radha had dissed the coffee's quality saying, 'It's not fit even for a dog!'. Later I called that boy aside and told him to not carry tales to me even if Radha were to abuse me. And also told him not to mention how much he spent only on Radha but give me only the total spent on everyone. But such behaviour of Radha continued several times. Now, those were all hearsays, but this muttering under the breath was right before me. I didn't wish to put up with it. I called him aside one day and while remaining seated, told him, 'Mr Radha, you must understand your livelihood is from the fee this company is paying you. You are already a man of 80,000 rupees and with the 20,000 that I'm paying you, you are earning one lakh. If such a company is still a damned one in your opinion, I don't need such artists and you are free to leave, the car is there to drop you home'.

Randor Guy: You told him to go home?

**Janakiram** : Right away. Immediately, he came around and said, 'Please understand, I'm saying this only for your benefit. You have employed so many people and paying them but nobody is doing their job...' I cut him short saying I knew how to manage that but that was no excuse for him to talk the way he did especially in my own earshot! Then his make-up man and some others tried to reconcile but I was adamant that I could do without such artists. He came back apologizing that it was a slip of the tongue. Eventually I agreed on a few conditions. But I told him in very plain terms, 'You want someone to fetch your box from the car, while Padmini being a big artist herself, is doing so herself. You can get an errand boy for yourself and I will pay him whatever his charges are- say 20, 30 rupees. When I'm paying you 20,000 rupees, this

is a small sum for me. And I also heard you said the tiffin given here is not fit even for dogs... but I know you are bringing along two boys everyday just to eat the tiffin here...

Randor Guy: (laughs) Really so?

**Janakiram** : Yes. Two boys everyday. The tiffin wouldn't cost more than five rupees anyway. But, he'd order take- away from different outlets all over... he'd ask that some item be picked up from Buhari's, Biryani from Natesan's near Moore Market- a hotel that in his opinion was 'on the way'!

Randor Guy: Where was this Natesan's?

**Janakiram** : Inside Moore Market.

Randor Guy: Like Balu's?

**Janakiram** : It was the same. Run by a Mudaliar. Was known as Balu's Resort then. And the list will continue...pick up something else from ...what's that place on Mint Street?

Randor Guy: Srinivasa Bhavan?

**Janakiram** : Yes, Srinivasa Bhavan.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : In this fashion, he'd send out a list of items. Still the bill won't cross twenty rupees. So I decided to accommodate him. I offered to pay him twenty rupees everyday just as tiffin charges, saying he could choose to spend or save that money as per his wish, but I will pay that and the errand boy's salary. That's how it was settled.

Randor Guy: A difficult man to handle.

**Janakiram** : Nagi Reddy told me to have a thick skin...

Randor Guy: He advised you so...? (laughs)

**Janakiram** : What to do, when you book big artists and don't know how to handle them? Didn't have much money either. Padmini had some 20 to 25 pictures on hand. I had asked her for just 10 days to shoot my film. She wasn't sure I could finish within that many days. I told her openly her role didn't have any scope for sex appeal or dance as she was just a blind beggar girl in the film. She started to sob and said, 'Sir, everybody who approaches me wants to have some scope for sex appeal in my roles and get the tailors along to serve their purpose. They want me to act closely with the male artists in love scenes; maybe it gives them some voyeuristic pleasure...'

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : She went on, 'I have danced every dance form, be it Kathakali or Bharat Natyam. And here you are saying this'. I explained the story to her and fixed her fee as Rs.75,000. But she was gracious enough to refuse that and said, 'You pay just Rs.40,000, that too in four instalments of 10,000 each. And make sure every shot has been taken before the last instalment is paid. And you don't worry about anything'. And she kept her word. It was a challenge to complete her portions within 10 days, but I planned it and finished it in nine and a half days.

Randor Guy: In nine and a half days!

**Janakiram** : How I managed was something I wish to tell you. There was an artist by name Jaya who was the wife of my camera man Raju. She was also the maternal aunt of the cabaret artist Anuradha.

Randor Guy: Anuradha's mother was a costume assistant, wasn't she?

**Janakiram** : A hair-dresser. Her sister was this Jaya who was an extra dancer in movies. I had read many foreign books on film making and had some ideas. I made a

miniature table-top model of the entire set and used it to study and decide on the camera angles, entries and even lighting- whether thick or soft and such. Nagarajan the Chief Electrician was on hand to help. The set could be manipulated to serve like two different sets just by shifting the wall portions this way and that way and changing the entry points. Nagi Reddy had erected a small shed kind of thing of some 60 by 80 feet between two floors for some hospital set-up or so. That came in handy too. And I engaged this Jaya because she was the same height as Padmini. I stitched an extra set of Padmini's costumes for her and I engaged her to block Padmini's shots, because different colours would absorb light differently, though it was a black & white film. I used this girl to light-up my shots.

Randor Guy: She was standing in for Padmini...

**Janakiram** : Yes. And I would jot down the lighting options for every shot before hand as first set of options and second and so on. There was an assistant named Mannangatti for that. The moment a shot was done, the second set of options would be switched on immediately, for the second shot. There wasn't any time lost, only the camera position required changing. I fixed the camera on a dolly to move it around. No gap in between. While the camera position was getting ready, I'd give Padmini some time to relax. Poor girl was working hard and so busy... I got a fan and a bed in a corner with a screen for her to relax in private between the shot changes. It was a win-win situation for both of us. While she was getting time to rest and refresh, I was using the time for shot changes. This way, every day I managed to wrap up the shoot before time. Not a single day did I ask for extension. She was very happy about it and she kept her word.

Randor Guy: Padmini is a very good artist. Very dedicated.

**Janakiram** : Very co-operative. She was so good, you must see some of the photos. She lives the role, so to say. (inaudible) And the old lady was played by Nandi Velayudam's mother.

**03:47:22-03:54:14**

Randor Guy: What was your next effort after *Kannin Manigal*? Did you do any Tamil film? *Kannin Manaigal* came out in '56 you said. You said you went to Russia...

**Janakiram** : All over the world.

Randor Guy: What took you to those places? Not film making?

**Janakiram** : No, not film making. But since I was in the films, I wanted to know more about the world. I had written two stories. One was 'How to Become or Why I Became a Prostitute?'

Randor Guy: That was a film script?

**Janakiram** : Yes. For that I needed to know the characters of prostitutes. So I met them, bargained with them and they used to abuse me, but I took it all in my stride as my purpose was to learn about them. There was no point in getting irritated or angry. The other topic was *Thozhilali*. I wanted to study what was poverty all about.

Randor Guy: That was the story of Mayor of Casterbridge, Thomas Hardy's?

**Janakiram** : Yes.

Randor Guy: But you didn't make it? Because the picture that M G R made later ...

**Janakiram** : Only the title was stolen.

Randor Guy: Didn't have anything to do with Mayor of Casterbridge, only your title was taken.

**Janakiram :** They had not selected a name for the picture yet, when I wanted to meet M G R and he was in a shoot. Chinnappa Thevar was an 'extra supplier' for me in Coimbatore when I made a picture for Varadaraja Chettiyar.

Randor Guy: What picture was that?

**Janakiram :** *Jeevagan*, I think. Dhaadi Raj had left midway and...

Randor Guy: When was this? In 1940s?

**Janakiram :** No, it was around the same time as when *Kannin Manigal* was in the making. Somewhere about '53,'54.

Randor Guy: Who were the artists?

**Janakiram :** All Coimbatore people... I was called because I had made a picture in Malayalam in '49. So in the early fifties, they called me. But that didn't suit me as I have told you, my temperament did not suit my working with anybody.

Randor Guy: Where was it shot, in which studio?

**Janakiram :** In a Coimbatore studio only. One was Central Studio and the other was...

Randor Guy: Pakshiraja Studio which was originally Premier?

**Janakiram :** No, there was another one. In that studio only this Varadaraja Chettiyar was a partner.

Randor Guy: A third studio? That's news to me. Where was this studio?

**Janakiram :** From the Railway bridge you go turn right, it takes you to Pakshiraja studio. You have to go left for this one. Anyway I went and Chinnappa Thevar would receive me affectionately with a hug and always addressed me as '*Anney*'. On seeing me the title of my story *Thozhilali* must have struck him and that same evening, the

title was launched. Because I had already narrated the story to M G R but they wanted me to give a political angle to the story and I had refused.

Randor Guy: So you never made that Mayor of Casterbridge?

**Janakiram** : No, I couldn't. It was a good story that needed a lot of finance.

Randor Guy: Yes, a very good story.

**Janakiram** : In the last scene before he dies, he writes a very poignant note...

Randor Guy: I know, I too had tried to adapt it.

**Janakiram** : In fact, Sitrarasu had written very good dialogues.

Randor Guy: C P Sitrarasu. D M K leader.

**Janakiram** : Very fine dialogues and I showed it to Karunanidhi also. Kannadasan wished to make it under the title *Nagara Thandhai*. I told them of my intention and it was withdrawn. Despite all that, I could not make it.

Randor Guy: Even *Nagara Thandhai* was not made. That subject never seems to have got done.

**Janakiram** : Nobody has done it till now. Such an excellent subject. Full of twists and turns.

Randor Guy: Even now it can be done.

**Janakiram** : Yes, a beautiful subject. Nobody can give that kind of a twist.

Randor Guy: I tried to adapt it once. But abandoned it as there were no takers. But I still have some hopes.

**Janakiram** : If I dig, I may be able to retrieve the subject in Sitrarasu's own handwriting. *Thozhilali...*

Randor Guy: You mean the script? After your return from Russia, Paris and Sweden, what did you do as far as films were concerned?

**Janakiram** : I was planning for different subjects but by then here things had changed relating to star cast, team work...

Randor Guy: Groupism had sent in.

**Janakiram** : Yes, that didn't suit my taste. Everybody had an association. Light Boys' Association, Coffee Suppliers' Association and such. This didn't suit me. Once my own son came and supplied tea and he was beaten up.

Randor Guy: I'll tell you one incident. I was making a short film for Nagi Reddy. We were doing the re-recording in D Theatre with Menon with that moustache...you know BBC Menon? I the writer and director, Viswanatha Reddy the producer and some guests of Nagi reddy were all there. A boy brought some special coffee from Nagi Reddy's house in a cycle, parked the cycle in front of this D Theatre and entered. One worker came and held that boy by the scruff of the neck and an argument ensued. He protested, 'This may be Nagi Reddy's own studio and the film also may be his own. But you people can't drink this coffee here. If you must drink it, then you all will have to step outside the studio and there you can have it! That flask can't be brought in!'

03:54:15-04:24:28

Randor Guy: Earlier we were talking about your film making in Sri Lanka in Sinhalese. Can you say something about that movie?

**Janakiram** : As I told you there was this A T M Noor...

Randor Guy: Sri Lankan or...?

**Janakiram :** He was from Calicut but based in Sri Lanka. He went there and became a millionaire and owned about three ships. I was working on a story called *Lavana Mase* which meant 'Next Month'. I wanted to produce the theme of *Thirumbi Paar* in Sinhalese.

Randor Guy: Whose story was this *Thirumbi Paar*?

**Janakiram :** *Poomaalai* was the original story. I wasn't happy with that and I suggested to make it the story of Arunagirinathar with the same cast. Karunanidhi didn't like it.

Randor Guy: The original Poomaalai was not the sister of Arunagirinathar?

**Janakiram :** No.

Randor Guy: Later on it came as *Penthaane Vaendyum*? So the same thing you wanted to do as *Lavana Mase*?

**Janakiram :** It was written and approved and everything was on line. In Sinhalese. Ayesha Veerakko was the heroine and Dommie Jeyawardana who was a famous villain there... When I came here I wanted to make a different story, *Vendetta*. I liked the story, it came in Hindi as *Afsana*. Ashok Kumar, Kuldeep Kaur, Bina Rai... That was the only picture that I've seen twice. In the meantime everything was ready for shooting in Nayagan studio.

Randor Guy: In Colombo?

**Janakiram :** Just then I had to attend the Cine Technicians' Association meeting here. I was one of the founder members and had never missed any of the meetings. But this man refused to allow me to go. He was the boss but he didn't know the importance of

this meeting. And I didn't want to skip it either. In the argument that followed, he categorically said if I wanted to leave at all, I may but not alive!

Randor Guy: He threatened you?

**Janakiram** : I just returned to the hotel. Next to the hotel, the leader of the opposition of Sri Lanka, Mr.Sundaralingam was staying.

Randor Guy: A powerful man in Sri Lankan politics!

**Janakiram** : This Eelam situation all started there only. They were four brothers and all were eminent by name Nagalingam Chief Justice and.... His daughter was a good friend and I was almost like their family member. Since I wasn't familiar with Sinhalese, she used to help me in those matters. When I narrated this to her, she took me to her father. He immediately called Noor to come over and when he did, spoke to him in a rough tone that he'd send Noor packing to his humble roots as a street vendor of dried fish for threatening me. Noor was humbled and meekly submitted himself before him. He made him a sign a bond which declared that if I were to die anywhere anytime within the next five years of causes other than natural, Noor would be held responsible for my death!

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : But I saw some horrible sights, there were problems in Ceylon even then like what you have now. Once they severed a Tamil woman's breasts and sent it on a silver platter to Bhandaranayake. To mean, if this problem is not solved, you'll receive many more like this! Murder, fire and what not.

Randor Guy: The trouble had started even then? So this *Lavana Mase* was not made there?

**Janakiram** : No.

Randor Guy: So you came back to India?

**Janakiram** : Yes, there was no other go. I was brought to the airport with much *bundobast* by Gururathnam. I had been warned not to step out alone because of that death threat. The papers were reporting the casualties daily. In Hindu, the headlines were like, 'How many Deaths Today and How Many up to Date?'

Randor Guy: They were giving statistics?

**Janakiram** : On the first of January, they gave the percentage. There were pictures of supposedly a man pushing his wife from a car and running her over or a student pushing his Principal from a top floor because he punished him and such.

Randor Guy: All politically motivated?

**Janakiram** : The Tamil-Sinhalese strife was there. There was a month- long curfew. Sundaralingam took care of me and helped me reach the airport in his ministerial car. Thus I came back to Madras and I wanted to do something of my own. That was when I began work on the subject *Vendetta*. The artists were all known and another interested party offered to finance the film.

Randor Guy: Who was it?

**Janakiram** : Some W....Sinhalese man, who was the sole distributor for Damas watch company. Pereira was the name! It was made here. I took an entire floor of Newtowne studio on lease.

Randor Guy: Newtowne Studio in Kilpauk.

**Janakiram** : I wanted to be economical.

Randor Guy: What was the name of the picture?

**Janakiram** : Sihinaya, meaning 'dream'. I gave a positive touch to the character of Kuldeep Kaur which in the original was somewhat negative. I made it with a message that the dream of a woman should be to be perfect and happy with the husband and not cheat him or seek another man. Gunaratnam was the distributor. It was not a box-office hit, but made good money.

Randor Guy: You used the same artists who came along with you?

**Janakiram** : They were the ones that I had selected, they came here and stayed in my house which was a twin house. They stayed in one. It was made very economically.

Randor Guy: Didn't you have any problem in releasing it in Sri Lanka?

Jankiram: No, because Gunaratnam was a top man, next only to Ceylon Theatres. Muthuswamy was with him.

Randor Guy: Ceylon Muthuswamy. After this 'Dream' what happened? Afterwards you thought of making *Thozhilali* based on Mayor of Casterbridge, which didn't work out?

**Janakiram** : Didn't work out in the sense, one should know the subject matter well and artists too should be matured. I had chosen Padmini and M V Rajamma as the first man's wife. By that time their fee had gone up and it was not financially viable. I had managed *Kannin Manigal* somehow. So I decided a new one with new artists and decided on *Playboy*.

Randor Guy: Wasn't that a Hindi film?

**Janakiram** : Yes. But in Hindi too, I couldn't afford big artists so wanted to shoot in Singapore, Malaysia.

Randor Guy: Outside India?

**Janakiram** : Yes. There cabarets were common. I didn't like the cabaret artists of films here like Helen or Halam. I wanted to engage real cabaret dancers. I toured all over Singapore and Malaysia to scout for it. I had some interest in Hotel Oceanic where I had arranged for a grand performance and Subramanyam made me a member of the Tourism Advisory Committee. So as a way of promoting tourism...

Randor Guy: You managed to go as delegate? Did you have some interest in Hotel Oceanic?

**Janakiram** : Yes. I was a partner there. I also developed contacts with five star hotels like Oberoi and they offered good concessions for stay in any Oberoi hotel. They invited me to Kashmir too. I arranged a performance there as well. I was the first one to show case *Karagam* and *Kavadi* as cabarets in five star hotels.

Randor Guy: The folk dances...

**Janakiram** : A street performer was introduced to me by a car broker. He was quite talented but wretched in appearance. I gave him a modern make-over and booked him first with Oberoi Grand. His earnings then were Rs.400 for an all- night performance. I booked him for Rs 5000 for the entire month. He got to stay in the hotel premises itself, but obviously he was not used to such an ambience and I had to train and transform him so to say. I taught him how to eat, how to conduct himself, how to enter the cabaret and how to bow at the end of a performance when the audience clap and all that sophistication. Today he's the President of the *Karagattam* Dancers' Association.

Randor Guy: What is his name?

**Janakiram** : Kalaimani and Sakunthala was the female artist. Very talented and the Nepalese Consulate was very happy with their performance that I arranged a repeat show.

Randor Guy: So you went to scout around...

**Janakiram** : While in France, I had gone to see the cabaret *Moulin Rouge*. I realized it wasn't easy to do. There's a book with Toulouse....

Randor Guy: The famous painter.

**Janakiram** : I went to France to learn higher technique of colour cinematography. The principal gave me six rolls of film 16mm for me to shoot anything I wanted. I was already an elderly man and I had gone to learn, so they were curious to know what I was going to shoot, what my career aim was. The first thing I did was to go to the house of Toulouse (inaudible) with an air hostess of Air India. He wondered why I went there to take pictures when there were many beautiful sights in Paris. I told him how fond I was of cartoons and how I was impressed by his pictures in childhood and how I always wished to visit France for this. He put me through to his higher-ups.

Randor Guy: This *Playboy*- was it adapted from any film or book?

**Janakiram** : No. But *The Two Faced Woman* of Greta Garbo was suitable for an Indian film too. In that she doesn't like her husband to associate with any woman when he goes out of town. I started *Rock and Roll* with M R Radha and Gemini Chandra. I had to abandon it after shooting some six reels due to M R Radha's problems. There's something I can never forget about Radha's talent. He'd improvise his part on the go. In the story, his wife takes an oath from him before he leaves for Singapore that he would not associate with any woman. Later when she comes across the photos of

some and questions him about them, he'd bluff through the teeth about their names and identity. Like he'd give their names as Mr Black the Professor, Mrs Green his classmate's wife, Mr White etc., in keeping with our own desi names like Karuppaiya, Pachaiyappa, Vellaiyappa...And when she lays down a condition that he should not dance with any woman, he reasons, 'Why should I not dance? Dance is very much in our culture. Lord Krishna was a dancer and so was Lord Shiva. Don't you know of Rudra Thandavam?' He'd be on a roll and I would be speechless with the way he was adding his own lines to what I had written.

Randor Guy: Extempore! He was very good at it, was he?

**Janakiram** : Very talented. No doubt about that. But all that did not go through.

Randor Guy: That was a part of *Playboy*, was it?

**Janakiram** : I had wanted to make *Playboy* in Tamil and had given the name *Rock and Roll*, but it didn't go through.

Randor Guy: You abandoned it half way through.

**Janakiram** : Since I had made *Kannin Manigal* in black and white, I wanted to make one in colour. *Playboy* suited that. I had good support in Singapore and was given free food and rooms in hotels.

Randor Guy: Who played the major roles?

**Janakiram** : Roopesh Kumar.

Randor Guy: The Hindi villain of *Do Raha* fame.

**Janakiram** : I wanted a villain of hero's character but with a filmy rhythm. After seeing *Do Raha*, I booked him through a broker. He had finished that film and didn't have any offers. I gave him Rs.10000.

Randor Guy: Rs 10,000 as remuneration?

**Janakiram** : I gave him Rs40,000. Because I wanted my hero to look and feel good. But he turned out to be a villain for me.

Randor Guy: (laughs) In real life...

**Janakiram** : I didn't have any hopes of completing that picture. I had to use seven different people as his stand-by in several scenes, but I managed it well technically, so much so, nobody could detect that- not the Press, not even cine technicians.

Randor Guy: As his double? What was that technique?

**Janakiram** : It's like magic, a movement to movement cut. In seven places I had done, I can show you the picture. Many times even I can't make out. Because he didn't turn up, created problems at the airport. He was arrested and taken back because he was an Iranian and had no passport.

Randor Guy: You mean Indian Passport.

**Janakiram** : He had not taken any Naturalized Citizenship Passport or any such thing. Then we made arrangement for that one trip. But he misbehaved with somebody on the plane and was taken in. I can write a separate book on that story.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : It was the Christmas night. Nobody was there. The Ambassador or High Commissioner was (inaudible) son-in-law. He too was not there. Somebody else stood guarantee and he was produced at the airport immigration. Within 24 hours I took him to Hilltop.

Randor Guy: In Singapore?

**Janakiram** : No, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There's a Hotel Hilltop at Genting Highland. It's truly a Paradise, you can't believe it. On top of the hill there's a lake, a boat, a swimming pool.

Randor Guy: Fantastic!

**Janakiram** : Water is pumped up in six stages. It's more than a fairy land. And you get all types of food and rooms to suit all types of purses. They conduct community marriages with their own finance and all that.

Randor Guy: You shot there?

**Janakiram** : They gave me ten rooms with rent and food free for all my artists.

Randor Guy: Who were the other artists apart from Roopesh Kumar? Halam was one I think.

**Janakiram** : Yes and one Kamaldeep Kaur a topper from Pune Film Institute. I took her photos and she was very beautiful and I booked her. Three months later when I met her in Ooty...

Randor Guy: She had (inaudible) herself.

**Janakiram** : So I decided not to have her in the film and changed the story to make Halam take her place and as a prelude took a shot here in Ooty itself and without her knowledge, took Halam and made the film.

Randor Guy: It was shot completely in Singapore?

**Janakiram** : In Singapore and Malaysia.

Randor Guy: Who financed this project for you?

Janakiram: Almost myself. For the Singapore trip, I needed to give a bank deposit of rupees one lakh for getting permission.

Randor Guy: Like a security deposit.

**Janakiram** : A Bombay gentleman gave it. And another one lakh my bank gave, in foreign exchange. And four times that foreign exchange had to repatriated from my earnings. I was very sure of it and with the first sale of Singapore rights, I paid off Syndicate Bank.

Randor Guy: What was the budget of the film?

**Janakiram** : Just bordering on twenty lakhs.

Randor Guy: When was this?

**Janakiram** : Released it in '76. Preparations were on from '72 onwards. You know my method... I was myself the camera man, I had my own camera that I had purchased in Singapore, sent it to (inaudible), got it completely rebuilt. Kodak Ramamurthy helped me till the last screw. They were ready to even paint it. But I declined as it would have caused problem at the Customs. This camera was very old.

Randor Guy: How did it fare at the box office?

**Janakiram** : Very well. Whatever I had spent for my trips abroad I recovered.

Randor Guy: It gave you lots of profits?

**Janakiram** : Enough. Singapore rights alone gave back half my cost.

Randor Guy: It was a successful venture?

**Janakiram** : Yes.

Randor Guy: Did you dub it in Tamil?

**Janakiram** : As *Madhu*, *Maadhu*, *Mayakkam*. Even in Hindi, I wanted to name it *Sharab*, *Shameen* and *Shatranj*-Wine, Woman and Gamble was the catchword I gave for the advertisement. I didn't want any criticism so I said it was a slender story with

strong entertainment. There was no story, I took retakes after retakes and so many changes I myself did not know why...my editor had...

Randor Guy: Who was your editor?

**Janakiram** : P G Mohan. He's no more now.

Randor Guy: I know, he died.

**Janakiram** : He did an excellent job.

Randor Guy: Who was the music director?

**Janakiram** : Sonik-Omi. One is blind. They gave very good hit songs and one song (inaudible) became a big hit.

Randor Guy: The lab work you did in India or...

**Janakiram** : In Madras at Gemini. I wish to tell you about the photography...there are some basic rules for photography, but beyond that, everything is individual creativity.

Randor Guy: One's imagination.

**Janakiram** : Once, the shooting was the next day and the previous night I could not sleep, for some reason I wanted to see the location at 4 in the morning and I went there. Reaching there I saw lots of clouds floating and even passing through me. It was an open space with no trees on a hill top and had an unobstructed view. I wanted to capture it on camera. See with exposure there are 2 or 3 things. One is there are 24 frames. If you shoot 22 frames it makes the camera slower. And keep the shutter fully open. And on film you can go up to 3, 4, 5, 6. But if there is no light, keep it fully open. So just shoot and make the artists also act a little slowly. Slow walking will look natural. Then there is a method called Forced Developing. That should be 'forced

developed' to a density higher (inaudible). Nobody will be able to make out what was actually the colour of the sky that night, and in the darkness, red or blue, how it appears is not important. This is one's own bold decision. So then I shot that and came here to Gemini. There was one... he's no more now.

Randor Guy: Nambi?

**Janakiram** : No, before him. Was the laboratory chief...

Randor Guy: Narayanaswamy?

**Janakiram** : Yes, to meet Narayanaswami. Very busy and a little arrogant fellow. I gave punches for all the places where it had to be 'force developed'. (Inaudible) he did not know or what, I don't know but he called me and questioned who put such ideas into my mind, as if I didn't have a brain and needed someone to tutor me! I asked him what his problem was and he declared it can't be done and uttered something foolish like saying, ' (Inaudible) you get a letter from Kodak'. I retorted, 'Mr Narayanaswamy, you are making a blunder or it's your temper, I don't understand. What has Kodak got to do with this? I have paid Rs 3000 a reel for the film and if I open it in sunlight, Kodak will still return me the money? Once I've bought the film, Kodak has no business with it. And you too can't ask me to go to Kodak. It's either you know the technique to do it or not'. He retorted, 'How could you ask me so?' I replied, 'I feel you don't know what's 'forced development'. I was determined not to leave the lab without getting a certificate on paper. I knew they could not play around. It had to be fed in my presence and the whole process would take just one to one and a half hour. Believe it or not, you can see the film, all the night scenes were shot in the available light. It came out brilliantly. Credit goes to the Kodak film.

Randor Guy: What speed did you use?

**Janakiram** : ASA 100. Then that only was there. Now of course, you even have 400. The Kodak man in Singapore appreciated it. When I approached him to tell of my intention, he asked me to go ahead as it'd be a credit to Kodak after all. Everyone was surprised and happy. Krishnan took it to London. You can see the picture later. I'm trying to sell the worldwide rights. I offered it for five lakhs, now somebody has offered up to three lacs. I need the money for my medical treatment. It has already paid me well, and the buyer can make money by selling TV rights. It has a 'U' certificate and not 'A', despite having some sexy scenes. Very good cast. I've even taken some three topless shots for the foreign market and it's retained in Singapore.

Randor Guy: Topless shots of Halam?

**Janakiram** : No. One Willy Liniki, Australian...

Randor Guy: Where was it developed?

**Janakiram** : Everything was developed. We got permission from the Customs to carry raw film. Some were raw, some were canned.

Randor Guy: (laughs)

**Janakiram** : A Customs officer by name Ganapathi... his behaviour only gave me that idea. He demanded to know what was in the box and insisted that I declare the contents, the bill and sign and I did. That was that. Later I told him, I could have taken foreign currency worth a lakh of rupees in that box, but all that he wanted was just a sign. He appreciated me.

04:24:29-04:28:53

Randor Guy: After *Playboy*, didn't you do any other subject?

**Janakiram** : I did *Needhiya Nyayama*. That's a question I have to ask myself, *needhiya nyayama*? So foolishly...

Randor Guy: What was foolish about it?

**Janakiram** : It's lying there in the box, I spent three and a half lakhs.

Randor Guy: You completed the picture? In black and white?

**Janakiram** : Yes. You must have heard of 'Murder and Rivers'? That was the subject. It was actually a case that happened in London. It was in the papers and I made up the story from that.

Randor Guy: Who were the artists?

**Janakiram** : A V M Rajan, Kanchana, Sundararajan, Cho, Manorama.

Randor Guy: Fairly good cast.

**Janakiram** : But the only foolish thing that I did was, make it in black and white. For that time, it was alright. The time when the picture went to the censors, I went to the hospital for prostate gland enlargement.

Randor Guy: You were sick.

**Janakiram** : And it became complicated, septic. For four and a half years I did not see the light of the day. By which time the whole industry changed. I could not sell it. One had to give copies of the entire script shot by shot to the censors. And a copy would be taken by the office boy there and given to some producer who would then make xerox copies of the script overnight and return it. *Andha Kanoon* is the result of that.

Randor Guy: Same story?

**Janakiram :** And they made four crores. I heard somebody talking about it but I did not... later when I became President of Lions Club, there was this convention of... whichever movie was running then...

Randor Guy: Give an award?

**Janakiram :** No, take all the members to see it and give dinner or lunch. I took some 60 members to a restaurant in Mount Road for lunch and then to Alankar Theatre. It featured Rajnikant whose portion was there only because he wished to act with Amitabh Bachchan. As I sat through the movie, I kept feeling I had read the story before, had seen the movie before.

Randor Guy: It was your own story.

**Janakiram :** Even the last dialogue is my own, but I can't claim credit as the dialogue writer. 'A man can't be punished twice for the same crime' was what I had written in Tamil and the same thing in Hindi was there. Earlier, when my movie was lying in the cans, I had arranged for a screening for my members and they all remembered it and came running to me asking, 'How much money did you receive for this movie? They have not credited you!'. I was reduced to tears. I've got the whole print.

Randor Guy: It happens...

**Janakiram :** How am I alive still! Cho even asked me how I was able to go around smiling after all these. I don't mind crying for a month even, if I can get back even one tenth of what I've lost. What's the use of crying if that's not possible? Cho worked in that picture as the defense lawyer and wrote his own dialogues. A very good writer.

Sundar Rajan as the judge.

Randor Guy: Major Sundar Rajan.

04:28:54-04:36:59

Randor Guy: Now, I would like to ask you some general questions. When you started in the 1930s, you were talking about *Samsara Nauka*. We go back to 1936. The famous Kannada film of H L M Simha. At that time you were in Vale Pictures. Produced by Rajagopal Chetty. Do you remember its making? You worked as camera assistant.

**Janakiram** : I was camera assistant and was liked by all. The languages all became one. I Knew M V Rajamma since then.

Randor Guy: She came into prominence with that picture.

**Janakiram** : Her first picture.

Randor Guy: With B R Panthulu, Dickie Madhav Rao, Padma Devi, M Madhav Rao and all those were there.

**Janakiram** : Very successful picture.

Randor Guy: Recently I wrote about *Samsara Nauka* in Indian Express. A new series I'm writing on Memorable Movies. At that time I spoke to Mr Rajagopal Chetty, he said this picture was made in Rs.33,000 and that it collected over two and a half lakhs. In 1936, it was very big money and that the outdoor shoot was done around Panagal Park which then was full of trees, more like some woods. He also said that a song of Pattinathar was sung by Dhandapani Desikar in Tamil. It must have been very unusual to have a Tamil song in a Kannada film. Now they dare not do that. They may start throwing stones or setting fire to the theatres. But those days, things were different and there was more of tolerance; this kind of linguistic chauvinism did not exist, is what he said. You worked in the 1930s and also in the 1970s. What changes do you find in Indian Cinema?

**Janakiram :** You may say I'm being very raw here... having worked since then, to be frank, there was a devotion even among the technicians for the producer. If the producer had any problem the technicians would feel committed to finish the movie, will feel involved.

Randor Guy: A feeling of oneness.

**Janakiram :** You remember I told about the loss of sound in *Panduranga*? We all felt it as our own loss. Then only we found out about dubbing. Now it's like some friends have arranged for a picnic...go for the picnic, eat, throw things away and return. Same attitude is there.

Randor Guy: No professional approach.

**Janakiram :** That's why even a coolie today makes demands and shows attitude. Such things were not there then. You remember how in Motion Pictures, artists would make do with just peanuts with money from their own pockets with the sole aim of finishing the picture;even though the cash-strapped producer owed them money. Now they are not bothered.

Randor Guy: Self-centred.

**Janakiram :** Many producers have vanished because of the heartless behaviour of artists. Every one insists on their own...

Randor Guy: True, very sad state of affairs. I told you of an artist asking for Bisleri water, failing which she won't step out of her car! (laughs)

**Janakiram :** They demand so many things.

Randor Guy: Perhaps Bisleri water is the least of it all.

**Janakiram :** The producer has to cater to it all. Some technicians too behave like that.

Randor Guy: I know, I have seen it as part of this. That's one of the reasons I switched over to Television.

**Janakiram** : Once during the making of *Krishnan Thoothu*, Lena Chettiar had an Anglo-Indian girlfriend by name Apple, almost like his personal property. They were travelling to Kolhapur for shooting, all arrangements had been done. But just before leaving six technicians demanded six girls in the same train and one technician, don't wish to name him, wanted Apple herself! Lena Chettiar could not but cater to that. I hit back at my own technicians once. I had made a trolley of my own and I was also the first man to make a crane which is even now in Vauhini studio. The trolley was in Gemini. Earlier there was only one trolley with a stool on it, Vasam asked me and I made one dolly. When I went away to Mysore, I gave it to Vauhini. After six months, it was left neglected in a place where the coolies have lunch at noon. I was angry and abused the technicians asking, once upon a time they put their price up and demanded services of girls, but now, could they not respect the handwork of another technician and insist on using that trolley? I took it back in everyone's presence and came out. You asked me about the difference. This is what it is.

Randor Guy: Thank you Mr. Janakiram, for all the trouble that you've taken.

**Janakiram** : I'm part and parcel of this industry.

Randor Guy: We both are. Whatever we are today, we owe it to the industry and what this art has given us. Thank you very much.

**Janakiram** : You are always welcome.

Randor Guy: I wish you many more years of good health and you are planning a picture you told me in which I'll have something to do.

**Janakiram** : I wish to do my best but not with this..

Randor Guy: I understand. I wish you at least get better. Thank you very much Sir!

That was the interview with Cameraman, Producer and Director Mr. T Janakiram. Mr Janakiram is not too well right now but he's not prepared to call it a day yet. Indeed, he's planning to produce a movie in Tamil the script for which was written by me some years ago. Indeed, he's interviewing new faces for casting in his new film and wants to start shooting as soon as he's fit and able to move around. He wants to handle the camera himself. The spark that was in Janakiram in 1930s when he came as stranger to Madras to find his way in the movie world, still burns bright in him. On behalf of the national Film Archive of India Pune, Director Mr P K Nair and me and all of us in the movie world, I wish Mr. T Janakiram a speedy recovery and long number of years in service to Cinema. These interviews were held during the month of February 1991 at the residence of Mr Janakiram in Kodambakkam, Madras. This is Randor Guy wishing him speedy recovery and Au Revoir!