



# National Film Archive of India

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting  
Government of India

## Interview of Mrs. K R Chellam - one of the early actresses of Tamil cinema by Randor Guy

0:00:00

This is Randor Guy interviewing Mrs. K R Chellam, one of the early heroines and also character actresses of Tamil cinema. K R Chellam entered films in 1935 and was active till about 1960 when she retired from Tamil cinema world. She has acted in several films of merit and distinction as heroine and one of them called Adhrishtam or Luck directed by S D S Yogi is considered as one of the finest films made in Tamil of the period 1930-1940. This interview, the first one with K R Chellam, takes place on the morning of Friday May25th, 1989 at her residence in Langford Avenue, Raja Annamalaipuram, Madras. Mrs. Chellam speaks in Tamil.

0:01:19

**Q:** Greetings Ma'am! I'm pleased to meet you. It's been my keen desire to meet you in person for an interview for long but it was quite difficult to find your exact whereabouts.

**A:** I'm very much on this planet.

**Q:** (laughs). Indeed! After much difficulty I managed to meet you yesterday and you too agreed to meet me today. I wish to thank you on behalf of many people - first the National Film Archives of India in Pune and its Director Mr P K Nair. He is a man of

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great knowledge of the History of Cinema and he holds you in high respect. He is a great support and inspiration for us to take up this kind of work. On behalf of all those who are going to benefit out of your interview and on my own behalf as well, I wish to express my thanks to you. It's a great privilege. I must thank your daughter Doctor Ambujam Devi who is instrumental for this meeting to happen.

**A :** You are a lawyer and when I heard that you have given up your job and are doing this, I refused to believe it.

**Q :** (laughs)

**A :** I believed only when I heard it from your wife, not when my daughter told me. I even wondered whether you didn't have anything better to do, because I haven't heard of such an organization so far.

**Q :** Many don't know about this organization yet.

**A :** Moreover, I wasn't involved beyond my acting in the cine world. I won't engage much in conversation either. I was wondering what this was all about. But you explained everything, but more than you, your wife did an even better job of explaining and making me understand. I was just being apprehensive out of a sense of fear of the unknown, nothing else. I have been ailing and recently I had a heart attack.

**Q :** Yes, so I have heard.

**A :** For the last 23 years Dr Rajagopalan is treating me and I go for check-ups periodically. Even now, we've taken his advice for doing this interview.

**Q :** Whether it's alright to talk?

**A :** Yes. He tells me to be careful and keep a watch on my health.

0:04:08

**Q:** When did you first come to the cine field? I suppose it was in 1935 that you first acted in a film Kousalya.

**A:** It's for you to tell me.

**Q:** (laughs) You don't remember?

**A:** No, I'm truly uninformed. Don't laugh. I really don't know to write Tamil. I belong to an orthodox Vaishnav family. I had to be pushed to focus on studies.

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**Q:** Where was this film shot, can you recall? Was it in Madras?

**A:** Don't know where it started. Just landed at a place and were served good food for a couple of days. Only later I came to know what shooting meant.

**Q:** What role did you play in that?

**A:** I think it was shot in Chengleput.

**Q:** The outdoors was shot there? Was in done in a studio or shot outdoors?

**A:** Outdoors. One boy fell down the very second day, got hurt and the shooting stopped.

**Q:** Oh, it got stalled?

**A:** That was the end of Kausalya.

**Q :** But there's reference that the movie got released in Gaiety Talkies and ran exactly for one show.

**A :** Well, I'm not aware.

**Q :** You haven't seen the movie?

**A :** I've never seen any of my own pictures other than Balayogini.

**Q :** Any particular reason for it?

**A :** No specific reason, just the apprehension about criticism. I've been given a pet name, 'Touch Me Not'. I can't bear to hear any criticism.

**Q :** Touch Me Not! You were quite sensitive?

**A :** Think of the situations those days about cinema. Nowadays it's taken light. (indistinct speech) It'd be difficult even to step out.

**Q :** Being a cine artiste wasn't considered respectable, you mean?

**A :** Very much. Considered very inferior. Now cine artistes are considered even more prominent than Gods themselves! Those days cine artistes won't be given houses as tenants, no matter how much rent one was ready to pay. This is my take; I don't know about others. I've faced such situations myself.

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**Q :** Yes, I've heard so from Sahasranamam too. One would get neither a house nor a girl.

**A :** I'll tell you my own experience. When I spoke to my neighbour lady, she didn't wish to converse with me as I was acting in films. The windows and doors will be shut. One can't even go to a temple.

**Q:** People will crowd around you?

**A:** They will rattle out all our dialogues.

**Q:** They had them by heart!

**A :** One would tire of listening to everyone's advice. Even a murderer could have walked around boldly. But we'll be mocked at. (Indistinct speech). Our lives too have become like that. But I must say that the directors or people associated with cinema of those days and the love and respect that one received in the shooting spot or not there now. Not even one.

0:08:56

**Q:** The directors were so affable then!

**A:** They've had to deal with all kinds of fools to get work done. One would feel so sorry for them and feel they should be compensated well just for that. People used to say directors would trouble actors a lot but no director had troubled me ever.

**Q:** All were genial. After Kausalya, you had worked in the film Madras Mail in 1936. Do you remember? I suppose that film got you fame.

**A:** Yes. It was the role of a vamp. Meenakshi was the heroine.

**Q:** K N Meenakshi.

**A:** Battling Mani was the hero,

**Q:** Was C S Mani the same as Battling Mani?



**A:** There was another hero who played the king.

**Q:** Oh, it was the story of a king and a queen? How was it named Madras Mail then?

**A:** The villain seeks to avenge the one who got away with the girl whom he was in love with. And he uses me as a vamp for his ends. But I don't wish to play along and I try to escape by running and jumping out the window.

**Q:** Jumping from a height? It was taken in Bombay, right? Ramaniklal Mohanlal Studio, Andheri. Mohan Studio.

**A:** Usually, a substitute would do the actual jumping and only the close up will show the actor's face. And I had to jump from the third floor. And for safety somebody was holding a net to cushion the fall. But I didn't know whether I should fall on the ground or into the net.

**Q:** So, nobody told you...

**A:** Or maybe they did, but I didn't understand...I don't remember. Because I could not decipher a word of Hindi.

**Q:** Trivedi was the director and he didn't know Tamil?

**A:** I'm getting to know of the director's name only from you.

**Q:** Oh, you didn't know the director's name!

**A:** Battling Mani was in charge. Those days the hero's word was gospel.

**Q:** Was it?

**A:** Yes. At the count of three, I jumped and fractured my leg. Looking at my leg, people could well state that actors of yesteryears were ready to risk their lives even. One can't say how it is, now.

**Q:** So, you didn't jump into the net?

**A:** I must have done it in a hurry before ensuring the safety net was there. I was not aware of such things.

**Q:** Weren't you taught those things?

**A:** Can't say for sure whether I wasn't taught or whether I was dumb that I couldn't understand. All that I know is that I broke my leg. When I opened my eyes, I could see I was in a hospital. I lost a year because of that.

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**Q:** It took a year to be alright?

**A:** You see this knee...I'm still unable to walk properly. I don't step out much.

**Q:** Then how did they finish the movie? Did they wait for a year?

**A:** That was the last scene. All surrounded me and there was such a commotion!

**Q:** (laughs)

**A:** They made me watch seated on a chair. I couldn't believe it was me and had tears rolling down my cheeks.

**Q:** I have heard that the movie had a good run. Did you at least watch this film?

**A :** Because of that scene, everyone was eager to watch and more than checking on me or my welfare, all went away to see and were going gaga over the scene.

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**Q :** S S Kokko acted with you....

**A :** He was to play my double.

**Q :** Kokko was into stunts? Do you remember him?

**A :** Is he there?

**Q :** No, he passed away long time back.

**A :** Though we all were acting in the film together, there was no conversation beyond the greetings.

**Q :** No interactions...

**A :** He would climb up so fast.

**Q :** Do you know where he was from? I'm unable to find out from his name. Was he a Telegu? I've heard he was a buffoon in a circus.

**A :** Not a Telugu. I can say it because I've heard people of different languages like Punjabi and others, speak.

**Q :** He used to do comedy?

**A :** Indeed, was very good at it. His pranks will make everyone laugh.



**Q:** Not much is known about him, but his name was quite popular those days.

**A:** He didn't have any equal.

**Q:** He was that popular?

**A:** He acted so well. No vulgarity in the name of popularity.

**Q:** Very clean comedy, you mean.

**A:** Very decent yet very comic. A very good actor.

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**Q:** After Madras Mail, you acted in K Subramaniam's Balayogini. Can you share your memories?

**A:** First I went to his house. He and my father were familiar with each other as he too was a lawyer.

**Q:** In Papanasam.

**A:** In Kumbakonam. They both were in a conversation but I wasn't privy to their talk. I told how I had broken my leg. Later would go on walks every day to get alright. My elder brother would try some home remedy by wrapping a cloth around a heated brick and placing it on my leg. In that movie there weren't any long scenes.

**Q:** Was it a movie with many children?

**A:** Not many children, just a brother and a sister. Both have a child each. There's an English lady who is a friend.

**Q:** Who played that role? Your co actors? Viswanathan?

**A:** Viswanathan was the hero. Ammulu was his wife.

**Q:** And the daughter was Baby Saroja. She was introduced in that film and she became popular in that movie. Who else in Balayogini, do you remember?

**A:** The English woman's name I forget.

**Q:** She was not an English woman but an Indian.

**A:** She'd wear dress like the anglo-indians do.

**Q:** Wore a gown...

**A:** Can't remember.

**Q:** It's alright.

**A:** People told to watch the film, but I didn't.

**Q:** Where was this shot?

**A:** Madras Mail in Calcutta.

**Q:** Madras Mail in Bombay.

**A:** Madras Mail in Bombay and Balayogini in Calcutta.

**Q:** Not here?

**A:** After Balayogini was taken, all artistes came from there to here.

**Q:** Oh, only then they started the studio here.

**A:** Here, Motion Picture.

**Q:** Where the old Gemini studio was.

**A:** Old Gemini was Motion Pictures.

**Q:** He had named it Motion Pictures Producers Combines. So, Balayogini was taken in Calcutta. S D Subbulakshmi was there?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** But looks like she didn't act in it. I've done a similar programme with her and she said she was there just to help and not to play any role. And that they introduced several child artistes other than Baby Saroja like Bala Saraswati who used to sing songs.

**A:** Well...(indistinct) Of them all, I was the eldest.

**Q:** Varalakshmi too was in it. Did it have a good run?

**A:** It's like this. When the husband starts neglecting... a nice family, when suddenly the husband gets friendly with an English woman and they go ball- dancing, the wife is saddened. The child too prattles something...there's a song...

**Q:** Do you remember the song?

**A:** Kanmaniye thaalelo

**Q:** Did you sing?

**A:** First I refused to sing.

**Q:** Can you sing it now? Just to hear the tune... there's no orchestra.

**A:** You stop now (recording), then I'll sing.

**Q:** No, how can everyone hear it if we stop? It's alright even if it's out of tune.

**A:** Can't recall the lyrics.

**Q:** Sing at least the first line.

**A:** Kanmaniye Thaalelo (sings)

**Q:** I'm glad that you sang at least this much. Do you remember who the music director was?

**A:** Sivan and we all...

**Q:** Papanasam Sivan. Rajagopal Iyer and Papanasam Sivan were all from the same place. So, this film was made in Calcutta.

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**Q:** What did you do after returning to Madras? That was 1937. You did a film called Desa Munnetram, which was called Onward March.

**A:** That too was in Bombay.

**Q :** Oh, that too in Bombay? In that KS Gopalakrishnan, Sreepatha Shankar, Maadhirimangalam Natesa Bhagavathar Iyer had acted in it. But nobody seems to know anything about that film. Can you recount anything?

**A:** I think the film didn't proceed beyond a point.

**Q:** The film did come out I think but looks like didn't run much.

**A:** Because in that, a brahmin girl marries a non-brahmin.

**Q:** Looks like a reformist kind of a themed movie. You do remember that it had another title Onward March.

**A:** Then there was Jalaja, I acted in that too. We used to sit and watch, but there wasn't much of any character in those. Like that there were so many.

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**Q:** K S Gopalakrishnan who acted in that was a Congress man and he later directed the movie Chakradhari under Gemini. He passed away a couple of years ago. Do you remember him?

**A:** He was a good friend of my elder brother.

**Q:** Was he a good actor?

**A :** Educated but joined Congress and they were of rebellious bent. Was jobless and thanks to K Subramanyam's association, all this was possible.

**Q :** So, all these were K Subramanyam's friends and Congressmen? I was little acquainted with Sreepatha Shankar who later took Mangayarkkarasi , even he is no more now. So that was Desa Munnnetram.



**A :** I used to be indifferent about acting. But they impressed upon me to continue in films as there were two kids to be taken care of with good education. I was given sane advice that it's not the end of the world if the husband abandons a woman and anyway it wasn't as if one was born with a husband and so many women are managing life without one. All were brotherly towards me.

**Q :** All were affectionate towards you. You too must have reciprocated the affection, only then it must have been possible.

**A :** I used to retort...

**Q :** (laughs)

0:22:09

**Q :** You acted in a film Adhrishtam in 1939. S D S Yogi. That film generated quite a buzz as a good film.

**A :** I had heard that there two, three versions.

**Q :** What was special about the film? You had played a lawyer in that.

**A :** Yes, a lawyer with arguments.

**Q :** There were court scenes?

**A :** You can't find such court scenes now.

**Q :** I've heard so from RM Krishnan that they were excellent.

**A :** He only taught me. And the set was filled to capacity with all reporters.

**Q:** Oh, they had come to watch...

**A:** He got all reporters to come and occupy the seats for the court scene., and all were keen anyway. A particular scene required me to raise my hand and look up. Since I was short, I improvised by standing on a brick and had everyone in splits. And the set was filled to capacity with all reporters.

**Q:** (laughs)

**A:** I had to be mindful of my dialogues and the camera angle and all.

**Q:** Of course.

**A:** I was very happy. Even my father complimented me on my performance.

**Q:** He was himself a lawyer.

0:23:32

**Q:** I've heard that you mouthed some dialogues in English and that it was great.

**A:** I didn't know a word in English.

**Q:** Then how did you manage? By writing it in Tamil?

**A:** I could repeat well. Right from my childhood, I could speak or do as told easily. I was quick to catch on... but right now, quite dumb.

**Q:** (laughs)

0:23:54

**Q:** Can you recall anything about S D S Yogi?

**A:** I acted in his movie. I've never seen him raise his voice ever.

**Q:** A soft-spoken man?

**A:** Not just with me, but with everyone. He'll always be doing something or the other but...

**Q:** Never be loud?

**A:** Very polite even while asking me to act in a particular way and once I do as he says, will be fine with it.

**Q:** So genial...

**A:** Yes, never seen anyone like him, given how troublesome we were!

**Q:** Do you remember who produced this film Adhrishtam (Luck)?

**A:** There was one Chokkalingam Chettiyar.

**Q:** He was the producer? Shot in Madras?

**A:** In Madras.

**Q:** Which studio?

**A:** Newtowne.

**Q:** Was Newtone established by then? It was founded in 37, so it was shot there?

**A:** When exactly Newtone...

**Q:** Yes, 1937 and it was shot in Newtone.

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**Q:** We were talking about this movie Luck. You had mentioned that you wrote down the English dialogues in Tamil and spoke. Can you mouth any of those English dialogues now?

**A:** Why? It might be right or wrong.

**Q:** It's alright even if it's wrong.

**A:** There was a director by name Krishnan.

**Q:** Yogi's assistant?

**A:** Yes. In his opinion, I was a good actress. He urged me to not be scared and I started off.

**Q:** Please speak the dialogue.

**A:** 'My cards on the table. It is the (indistinct)the honourable members of the Jury to deal justice'.

**Q:** Thus, you spoke...

**A:** There were many more.

**Q :** Yes, so I've heard. R M Krishnaswamy had seen and had told me the court scenes were very realistic in the movie.

**A :** Not just being good, it caught the Government's eyes too.

**Q :** Was it based on the Norton case or maybe some rape case.

0:26:14

**Q :** Who was the hero in that movie? V V Sadagopan? What role did he play? You were the lady lawyer.

**A :** He's the lawyer's clerk.

**Q :** So, they both fall in love?

**A :** Suryakumari is in the movie.

**Q :** T Suryakumari.

**A :** Her father is a rich man. He has willed his property to his daughter. He isn't keeping good health. The daughter is a sweet girl and I'm staying in their house and he is the clerk. This clerk wishes to lay his hands on the riches. So, he pretends to love me and marries me and plots to grab the wealth. That girl wears a chain with a golden locket. She sings a song and sings well.

**Q :** 'Ayya sirupenn yezhai enpaal manam irangaadhaa' the song became very popular.

**A :** The case comes up for hearing the next day and if I manage to submit evidence in court, he'll be finished. My senior is away and, in his absence, I happen to check the papers and I come across a notebook where everything is written.



**Q:** So, with the help of those papers, you find out everything?

**A:** I don't find out. (indistinct)

**Q:** Yogi did the story, dialogue...?

**A:** He never shied away from work and did just right. (indistinct)

**Q:** I did a similar programme with R M Krishnaswamy some four years before he died. He had mentioned that this film met with some problems with the Censors, but for which it might have had an even better run. I have worked on some scripts with him and he often used to mention so. Do you remember anything?

**A:** How to tell you that? (Conversation stops and resumes) 0:29:02

**Q:** RMK had told me that Adhirshtam encountered some issues with the Censors and that otherwise it would have even better. Can you share something about it? Censor issues in those days...?

**A:** Certain things that happened in my scenes, I myself felt were vulgar. The girl goes into the clerk's room...

**Q:** Who, the girl who got raped?

**A:** It's still not sure if she was raped or not. But she goes into his room and he snatches the letter she had hidden in her waist and she snatches it back and tries to run. That's when I enter.

**Q:** What's vulgar in all this?

**A:** I try to get to the truth and in that process, ask her some probing questions that lead to some embarrassing details. I felt absolutely mortified that one had to get into details on a disrobing matter. Theatre people had all come in that court scene. The court itself was set up spaciosly.

**Q:** I have seen pictures of that scene where you argue. In the still photo there's someone like a servant who's in the witness stand and you are questioning him. He's wearing a loose turban and has a moustache too. Can you remember the artiste's name?

**A:** He's the hero. I'm cross examining him. I'm in a dilemma as I need to free him and at the same time I need to win the case too. It went on for 3 days with 23 witnesses.

**Q:** 23 witnesses you say. Did they show you examining all the 23 witnesses fully in the movie?

**A:** No. The witness will be called to testify but other lawyer will quash the statements of these witnesses.

**Q:** Who was the artiste who played your counterpart lawyer, you can't remember...?

**A:** No. But he did fine.

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**Q:** You recounted one interesting incident while recording a song at My lady's Garden near the zoo when a crowd gathered around. Can you share a little more?

**A:** Can I take some time to recall, I may remember very little.

**Q:** It's fine if you narrate how much ever you remember.

**A:** Varuvaalo varamaattaalo (sings)

**Q:** Who wrote this? This too was Papnasam Sivan?

**A:** All by Sivan only.

**Q:** When Adhirshyam was being made, pre-recording songs- was it already in practice?

**A:** Adhirshyam...

**Q:** Did Yogi write them? He was called Bala Bharathi.

**A:** When you see the words, doesn't look like it was by Sivan.

**Q:** Yes, it does sound like Bala Bharathi Yogi's. So, were the songs pre-recorded or recorded on the set live?

**A:** Both. Some pre-recorded, some on the set. In Balayogini, it was done prior.

**Q:** That was in Calcutta. But during the time of Adhirshyam which was in 39, recording facilities had come in Madras, I think. If you can't recall, leave it, no harm.

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**Q:** Can you talk about the incident at the zoo, while shooting a song at My Lady's Garden?

**A:** A crowd had gathered.

**Q:** There were crowds even those days?

**A:** One must say now it's nothing like those days. During afternoons somewhat fine. But in the evenings people would be returning from work and will gather around. It also depended on how they were treated. If one dealt with them in a high-handed manner, they'd hurl stones at us. We've survived all that.

**Q:** What happened when this song was shot?

**A:** The area was barricaded. The hero comes singing Varuvaalo Varamaattaalo from one end and I come from the other end. There's a fountain in the centre and I'm supposed to go around the fountain. There were catcalls and booing from the crowd watching. I felt so ashamed to listen to their comments.

**Q:** They were so indecent?

**A:** Yes. What to do? Young blood...(indistinct)

**Q:** You spoke of an incident when the police arrived. Please say something about it.

**A:** The police came soon after the skirmishes started. They surrounded me and when I complained about the crowd's behaviour, they told me not to pay heed and moved me aside.

**Q:** You also mentioned that you were left in the lurch...

**A:** (indistinct) I didn't understand the connection between ... (indistinct). Even the policemen laughed. Even I laughed.

**Q:** Please talk about them leaving you alone and going away.

**A:** While the song was getting picturized, the crowd surrounded the spot and were getting rowdy and I was so frightened for my life.

**Q:** The situation got out of hand...

**A:** Yes. The police came rushing in even as the people were instigating one another to do this and that.

**Q:** What did the crew do? The ones like make-up man, cameraman....

**A:** They were far away, while I was in the centre. My brother who was there was hit by a stone.

**Q:** So there was stone-throwing too? And you were in water?

**A:** Not water but what you find on the roads...

**Q:** The fountain?

**A:** Yes, I'm going around the fountain singing.

**Q:** So, nobody was nearby...

**A:** Nobody could have approached me, because there were cameras placed here and there and I was in the centre concentrating on my scene and I got very afraid of the swelling crowd. A crowd will gather the moment they get the boards to the spot.

**Q:** The reflectors...people will get to know that a shooting is going to happen when they see clap boards and reflectors.

**A:** (indistinct)

00:39:42

**Q:** Before this movie Luck, you did Vanaraja Karzan, a movie which created lot of excitement. It had the Hindi actor John Kawas who used to act with Nadia. Do you remember the movie?

**A:** Of course, I do.

**Q:** Who made the movie?

**A:** Wadia.

**Q:** Oh, in Bombay- Wadia Movietone. The shooting too happened in Bombay?

**A:** Yes.



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**Q:** Also directed by Wadia?

**A:** Homi Wadia.

**Q:** The Senior?

**A:** The Junior.

**Q:** Oh, Homi Wadia was the junior and Jeh Wadia was the senior? Wasn't it Homi Wadia who married Nadia later on?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** How did you get into this production by North Indians?

**A:** I had gone there for this movie...

**Q:** Madras Mail?

**A:** No, the other one you were asking me about.

**Q:** Desa Munnnetram.

**A:** The entire unit was in Bombay for Desa Munnnetram but unfortunately, they fell short of funds and could not continue. So, they themselves collaborated with Homi Wadia and decided on this. I don't know how I caught their eye, but Gulshan Mehra was the one who recommended me to them. And all were shifted from here to there.

**Q:** The Desa Munnnetram group went over to their set-up?

**A:** Everyone got paid.

**Q:** This Vanaraja Karzan- was it jungle related?

**A:** There was an agreement to be signed. (Indistinct). So, I signed.

**Q:** Without reading the document?

**A:** Read it alright. But didn't understand anything.

**Q:** (laughs)

**A:** All I knew was that I'll have to oblige in terms of any location and any costume. Three fourths of the movie got done. And the scene required me to be running away from a lion and a crocodile. Have you seen it?

**Q:** No, I haven't. Couldn't find a print anywhere. Got to see only a still photograph.

**A:** And I was given a particular costume to wear and I refused.

**Q:** You refused.

**A:** I was told, "it's a serious matter and this is the last scene. The movie will be done with that. It can't be re-shot with somebody else. More than a lakh has been spent and you will have to compensate the loss".

**Q:** You were threatened with the fact that you had signed the document?

**A:** I was assured that I won't be put to any danger or embarrassment. I was told they'd strictly punish anyone who'd so much as stare at me. Somebody would be standing right behind with a night gown. I would wear it and take it off just for the shot and ...

**Q:** Put it on immediately after.

**A:** Yes, put it on at once.

**Q:** Do you remember anything of John Kawas who used to act with the famous Nadia?

**A:** You'll be surprised to know how I managed to act with them. I knew neither English nor Hindi. They used to communicate with me through some of the TAMILIAN actors who were there.

**Q:** Was John Kawas an Englishman or ...

**A:** He was a Parsi I suppose.

**Q:** A Parsi, was he? Wasn't he a popular stunt actor then?

**A:** He had acted with Nadia.

**Q:** Yes, in Hunterwali...Did Vanaraja Karzan have a good run?

**A:** There was even a murder there!

**Q:** A murder?

**A:** At the ticket counter.

**Q:** A commotion?

**A:** I heard so.

**Q:** For buying the ticket...

**A:** Even today it'll fetch a crowd.

**Q:** Must have been a terrific film. Tarzan type...?

**A:** Almost like Tarzan.

**Q:** Hence the name Vanaraja Karzan, with a slight name change. Did it have a monkey as in Tarzan?

**A:** A monkey, a dog.

**Q:** Did you sing any song in that?

**A:** I can remember just a little.

**Q:** A lapse of nearly 50 years since...

**A:** (sings).

**Q:** Good. Was the music was recorded in Bombay itself? With Bombay's music director?

**A:** They were quite...

**Q:** You may not remember those details perhaps.

**A:** They had their set-up and we had ours. But I did not pay attention to those matters.

**Q:** You just acted out your part and did nothing more.

**A:** You see, I didn't have anybody there.

**Q:** So, you always had that fear that you were alone.

**A:** I was alone, didn't have money, no one to help around. If anything happened, no one to care either. Even today, I don't let Ambujam go out much. (indistinct).

00:46:20

**Q:** You did the film Tulasidas.

**A:** Yes, I have.

**Q:** Was it the same one where M K Radha and Sabitha Devi acted?

**A:** Yes.

**Q :** Heard it was taken in Calcutta. East India Company...What was your role in Tulasidas?

**A:** Vamp.

**Q:** Who directed it? Raja Chandrashekhar?

**A:** Yes. He would never be cross with me.

**Q:** Was he an angry man?



**A:** His countenance made him look as if he was. His wife was indisposed.

**Q:** She was ailing?

**A:** I was a friend. People present only one side of the story; they don't speak of their mistakes. If you say someone beat you up, you must have done some mischief too, otherwise no one is crazy to do so on their own, right?

**Q:** Did the movie run well?

**A:** I heard so.

**Q:** You didn't watch it.

**A:** Much later, during the time of Pavai Vilakku.... this one turned up...

**Q:** MK Radha?

**A:** Yes, he told me so. Everyone appreciated the film.

**Q:** Was it a devotional film?

**A:** Very much so. Like Bilhana...

**Q:** Chintamani...

**A:** Yes. (Indistinct) this fellow jumps over the wall with a snake and the wife tells him to show devotion to God instead of showering affection on her.

**Q:** Oh, a similar story perhaps. After this you came to Madras and did Gemini's first film Madana Kamarajan. What role did you play in it?

**A:** First wife.

**Q:** MV Rajamma was the second?

**A:** She's the minister's wife. He later loves Vasantha.

**Q:** KLV Vasantha. V V Sadagopan was the hero?

**A:** Yes. Vasantha is there?

**Q:** Yes. She's here only.

**A:** She's fine?

**Q:** Yes. Can you recall about this movie?

**A:** The prince goes to the forest and there's a girl there. He turns into a stone and such...his father had gone ahead and he too had turned into a stone. The young lad has to fulfil three challenges in order to marry the girl.

**Q:** A folk lore of king and queen...

**A:** There was one by name Rajasimhan that was played in my brother's school, I've seen.

**Q:** Do you remember B N Rao the director of that movie?

**A:** Is he there?

**Q:** Yes. You don't seem to remember him...

**A:** I don't wish to say.

**Q:** If so, let it be. What was Vasam doing those times? Was he involved in the sets? He had just then started the studios.

**A:** Though he had just started, he'd be there for the rehearsals, sets and even for meal times.

**Q:** He was so actively involved!

**A:** Of course, he was the one active genuinely. The rest were there for eating and acting...

**Q:** But he won't interfere in direction I suppose as he didn't know of direction then.

**A:** The outdoor shooting was on.

**Q:** Where was it?

**A:** In Mysore. All were seated and I was talking to someone like a clerk. The clerk was coaxing me to speak up myself without any fear and I clammed up. Vasam sent for me and told me to speak freely. In the story, there's a curse by a bird that the person would die under a tree and the sets were being put up right under a tree! I pointed this out to Vasam but told him not to expose that it was my idea as it would have landed me in a situation making it uneasy for me to continue. He was so tactful about it. He bought time by waiting till tea time just so nobody would suspect and then called out 'Subbu!'

**Q:** Kothamangalam Subbu?

**A:** Yes. When he pointed out the mistake, they agreed and he got the set changed.

**Q:** So, he was the kind who listened to advice.

**A:** On another occasion...there was this Durai...

**Q:** T S Durairaj., comedian.

**A:** He'd be teasing me constantly.

**Q:** Poor man is no more.

**A:** (Indistinct)

**Q:** What happened with Durairaj?

**A:** His teasing crossed all limits and I refused to come for the rehearsals the next day and I could not be coaxed to come, I would have let it pass if it had been something trivial. I was ready to take the train back that night itself. He asked if he could convey my decision to people as it was, I said indeed he must convey it, only then can there be an end to the hassle. What exactly he conveyed, I did not know.

**Q:** To Vasan?

**A:** Yes. Vasan sent for me and asked me in a genial way what the matter was. I broke into tears. He assured me nothing would happen to me if I spoke out. I said I didn't have any issue with anybody other than...

**Q:** Durairaj?

**A:** He told me to listen to him as I would to my father. He said I had many more movies to act and I should not pay heed to whatever others say, must just ignore and get away. (Indistinct)

**Q:** He suffered a lot in his last days. Lost all his money.

**A:** Strictly speaking...(indistinct) (Conversation interrupted and resumes)

00:57:41

**Q :** Before the break while talking about Madana Kamarajan, you mentioned an incident involving a horse. Please continue.

**A:** There's the Raja (King)

**Q:** Sadagopan.

**A :** And I'm his Rani (Queen). There's a magician in a cave who promises me some medicine that'll get my husband back to me.

**Q:** Like a love potion?

**A :** Love potion indeed. I'm standing on the road to Srirangapatnam with river Kaveri flowing on both sides. (Indistinct) The hero holds onto the horse's reins and just as he's mounting it, the horse sets off. (Indistinct)I didn't know what to do and just lay down and the horse just ran past me and everyone felt I was lucky to have escaped.

**Q:** Sadagopan didn't know horse riding?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Knew only to sing? (laughs)

**A :** If one were to come up in life, (indistinct) one needs money otherwise no one respects you.

**Q:** You must have sung some song in it.



**A:** Can't recollect.

**Q:** He sings a song in it which was telecast on TV some 7,8 years back, the print of which is there in Gemini as well as in Pune National Film archives. It goes something like Prema nee illaamal...is it Hema or Prema?

**A:** Prema... (sings)

**Q:** It played on TV and I saw it. Who's that Prema-was it you?

**A:** That was Vasantha.

**Q:** KLV Vasantha. She's the beauty he goes in search of.

**A:** The horse went straight ahead and stopped at the stable.

**Q:** Sadagopan- was he atop the horse or had fallen down on the way?

**A:** The horse went right ahead to the stable.

**Q :** He went and fetched it from there? Vasan those days had interest in racing. Veppaththur Kittu had mentioned to me that race horses were brought in. The horse incident was very interesting.

01:01:42

**Q:** At the same time as Madana Kamarajan, you did another movie Suryaputri.

**A:** It was by Motion Pictures.



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**Q:** Motion Pictures Producers Combine. It was directed by Ellis R Dungan, Moylan. Do you remember Ellis R Dungan?

**A:** A good director. I didn't know English and...

**Q:** He didn't know Tamil.

**A:** We'll just greet each other 'Good Morning'. (Indistinct). He was quite content with my acting.

**Q:** How did he manage to direct, without knowing Tamil?

**A:** There were so many around who didn't know Tamil. There was a Kannadiga...

**Q:** Nagendra who did Jataka Phala.

**A:** Didn't know a word of Tamil.

**Q:** I showed you a songs book with your picture. It mentions both Dungan and W. Moylan. Did Moylan too direct or was his name there just like that?

**A:** Both would come and each would look after different things, but there were some hassles...

**Q:** Moylan didn't know Tamil?

**A:** Neither knew. Kalki Sadasivam was around always.

**Q:** That must have been during Meera, Shakuntala. That was later.

**A:** It was all around the same time.

**Q:** Suryaputri was in 41...

**A:** It was just Mylon for Suryaputri.

**Q:** Dungan didn't come, is it? I did a similar programme with Kothamangalam Seenu. He acted with you too.

**A:** I acted in it and Senbagarajan was ...

**Q:** Kothamangalam Seenu.

**A:** Princess was....

**Q:** Sulochana.

**A:** I didn't have any problem. Just did what I was told.

**Q:** That was made here in the old Gemini studio MPPC?

**A:** Yes, it was known as Motion Pictures

**Q:** Yes, Motion Pictures Producers Combine.

01:04:23

**Q:** After this movie you did Kaaraikkaal Ammayaar.

**A:** (indistinct) I did just a couple of scenes.

**Q:** Who else acted in it? Not much is known about this movie.

**A:** (indistinct) Kothamangalam Seenu...

**Q:** Did he act in it?

**A:** (Indistinct)

**Q:** I don't think anybody is there. I met him just last year. Did Kothamangalam Seenu act in it?

**A:** He didn't.

**Q:** Kaaraikkaal Ammayaar is the story where she walks on her head upside down, right?

**A:** Paappaa, Tirunelveli Paappaa acted in it.

**Q:** She acted in Tiruneelakandar too.

**A:** That must have been someone else.

**Q:** Then it was Mayavaram Paappaa?

**A:** Maybe.

**Q:** Tirunelveli Paappaa passed away just last year at 88. She had hoped to get big breaks. But it didn't materialize. Do you recall your role in Kaaraikkaal Ammaiyaar?

**A:** That of a wife, what else?

**Q:** (laughs). Who directed it? You said it was made in Coimbatore. But which company, which studio or who directed it...looks like it didn't have a decent run.

**A:** Not that it didn't run.

**Q:** Was C V Raman in it? Do you remember the name? He was originally a lawyer who later came into movies. He was the brother of A Narayanan. He made Bhakta Hanuman. Well, you don't seem to know. I heard that he was involved in this movie. I'm unable to ascertain the authenticity of it. Still trying.

01:06:13

**Q:** Do you remember anything of Poompaavai?

**A:** Poompaavai Ratnam.

**Q:** Whose was it - Leo Films? They seem to have produced it; they belong to Coimbatore.

**A:** I was Poompaavai's mother.

**Q:** Was it the story of Azhwars? A devotional one?

**A:** Ratnam has acted in it.

**Q:** Kali N Ratnam?

**A:** Jeevaratnam.

**Q:** U R Jeevaratnam. She's there. And K R Ramasamy.

**A:** Who else...



**Q:** I suppose these were the main. It was the first picture of Krishnan Panju, Panju has told me so.

**A:** Did it have a good run?

**Q:** Panju told me the songs were great.

**A:** Jeevaratnam sang very well.

**Q:** The songs were popular. Podhum Podhum indha jenmam...

**A:** Are they alive?

**Q:** Panju is no more, Krishnan is sick though. Panju was a friend.

**A:** Where is he?

**Q:** Krishnan is somewhere here in Royapettah. Not keeping good health.

**A:** In hospital?

**Q:** No, he resides in Royapettah. Do you remember the song Podhum Podhum Indha Jenmam Bhoomi Mael Aasai lavalasamum Illai sung by U R Jeevaratnam? I've heard it was very melodious. Where was it shot- in Central or Pioneer?

**A:** Poompaavai? In Jupiter.

**Q:** I was told in Coimbatore...

**A:** A little here and a little there. Let me tell you something. Didn't know who the producer was.

**Q:** You didn't know? Then whom would you talk to about the contract and terms?

**A:** One had contacts who would approach and get to know about the production. Vasanth...such a gentleman and AVM... (indistinct)

**Q:** So, you didn't have direct contact with other producers. You may not remember of Leo Films. While on Poompavai, can you recall A A Somayajulu? He used to write dialogues, was he involved in this film? He was a friend of Y V Rao as well. He wrote the dialogues for Chintamani. A Telugu man writing Tamil dialogues! Panju told me Somayajulu was involved, but not many know of him.

**A:** To tell you the truth, all acted well. It's not as if one just sang and danced in a scene.

**Q:** Do you remember K R Ramasamy who acted as the hero?

**A:** He's no more.

**Q:** Yes. He was a singer, theatre actor...

**A:** (indistinct)

**Q:** You don't like? He was well known as a singer...in Velaikkaari...

**A:** Anna and Karunanidhi helped him come up.

**Q:** Yes, for his association with their party. You don't consider him as a great singer, you say. (laughs)

**A:** For that matter, I don't like Thyagaraja either.

**Q:** Is that so? (laughs)

01:09:59

**Q :** After this you did Meera...In 1942, AVM under their old name Saraswati Cine Lab, made My Wife. Recently it was telecast on TV and was well received for its modern trend, comedy etc, though it was made in 42. I even heard that impressed by that movie, the story has been adapted into a new movie. Did you see it when it was shown on TV? Where was it taken? In Madras?

**A :** In the same studio in Madras.

**Q :** Admiralty House. Sundar Rao Nadkarni directed. He' no more.

**A :** All gone!

**Q :** Nagarkoil Mahadevan acted in My Wife.

**A :** He's gone too.

**Q :** Yes. Recently so. Do you remember him? He used to play Naradhar.

**A :** Always smiling.

**Q :** Won't talk much? Looks like he was always made to sing. Can you recall anything interesting about the making of this movie My Wife? Was it shot in Marina beach? The scene with the car...

**A :** Maybe it was Sabapathy.

**Q :** Such a scene is there in My Wife.

**A :** Not my scene perhaps.



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**Q:** Yes. You are not there in that scene. Mahadevan is seen alighting from the car.

**A:** One won't go to the sets of others' scenes. Go only when called. Filming was quite difficult those days.

**Q:** During war time? Lots of controls maybe.

**A:** Even AVM's...(Indistinct) the one who went to jail.... I was booked for that movie.

**Q:** Rajayogi? It got stalled midway, wasn't it?

**A:** He went away, didn't he?

**Q:** Did you act in it? Did any shooting happen at all?

**A:** Have heard that there were some between him and Vasundhara. I was too timid and would be alarmed by....

**Q:** Oh, Vasundhara was booked as well? Was any song recorded? AT Krishnaswamy had told me that some songs were recorded. The songs are not to be traced.

**A:** I too heard from him so. Somethings happened and I decided not to show any curiosity about it.

**Q:** Because of the Lakshmikanthan murder case, may be one was afraid to talk to Bhagavathar. Were you acquainted with Bhagavathar?

**A:** Not at all. Only got booked for the same movie. (Conversation stopped and resumes)

01:14:14

**Q :** Yesterday we were talking about Chandraprabha Cinetone's Meera of MS Subbulakshmi and Sadasivam. It was released in 1945, so must have been made in 1944. Ellis R Dungan directed it. Can you recall instances of its making?

**A:** I could not understand anything of what was spoken, though I may be seated nearby. And any way I wasn't one to get involved. Everything was happening in a hurry.

**Q:** Why the hurry?

**A:** I couldn't decipher why. That was the time when...

**Q:** Was it because of the Lakshmikanthan case?

**A:** There was talk that a car had been burnt the previous day. I didn't make anything of it.

**Q:** Because you were not the type to be inquisitive.

**A:** Even if I had been, I still would not have understood much.

**Q:** It was taken in Newtowne Studio, right?

**A:** One didn't quite understand. We were sent home. I came to MS'S house and from there to my house. The next day it was all out. The whole city was abuzz with the news involving Bhagavathar.

**Q :** Ellis R Dungan had to direct and did Sadasivam help him out with the Tamil dialogues?

**A:** There were many to assist. He too would attempt some Tamil words.

**Q:** Dungan knew Tamil?



**A:** Very little. They were very work conscious once they come on the set.

**Q:** You acted as Meera's sister-in-law, the King's sister who poisons her.

**A:** I'll share this with you. In that scene, I am the one poisoning Meera, but she doesn't know it's poison. So, she is normal. But I got all shaky and was in tears.

**Q:** Why did you feel so?

**A:** What kind of an act is that to poison some one? And to film it?

**Q:** You could not even bear to think of such a thing?

**A:** We know it's the story. But the general public react in extreme fashion.

**Q:** But that is the victory for one playing a vamp or a villain, right? Did you sing any song in Meera?

**A:** No.

**Q:** All songs were of MS.

**A:** I had a good voice but I wasn't interested to sing if the meaning was not right. Even Papanasam Sivan tried to convince me to sing as my voice was good. But I was not keen.

**Q:** You weren't interested.

**A:** For that matter I wasn't interested in anything. Just act and that's it. That too because I didn't know anything else.

**Q:** Just to look after your family.

**A:** Just my two children, no other family. To raise them with good education and settle them.

**Q:** MGR played a small role in Meera, right?

**A:** Was it MGR or Balaiah?

**Q:** Balaiah too was there. Recently they showed on TV. Balaiah plays your husband, I think. Recently the Hindi version was played on TV at a late-night slot. I've seen the Tamil version of Meera too earlier.

**A:** I saw much later. K Subramaniam came and told me to come and watch a film that he had shot in different places in which his daughter had done the dancing. Shot in different temples.

01:21:03

**Q:** After this you did Naam Iruvar-We Two with AVM that was released in 1947. AT Krishnaswamy had said that it was shot in Karaikkudi. AVM's studio then was in Karaikkudi, wasn't it? Do you recall?

**A:** It was wartime. So, they shifted to Karaikkudi and did Naam Iruvar and Demon Land. Later even Penn was made there.

**Q:** Only later they returned here? Do you recall Naam Iruvar shooting? Mahalingam, TA Jayalakshmi, Sarangapani and VK Ramasami acted in it. You play VK Ramasami's wife is it?

**A:** He's the father and I'm the mother. Jaya is the daughter.

**Q:** Recently that too was played on TV.

**A:** (indistinct)

**Q:** The movie was received very well.

**A:** (Indistinct) I would think I may not be called for shooting afterwards.

**Q:** You were not perturbed; you didn't take it seriously...

**A:** I didn't understand the seriousness.

**Q:** When Naam Iruvar was made, was ATK around?

**A :** Of course, because after this only Demon Land was made. He was a man of few words. Not just with me but with everybody. But about work-related matters, he'd speak well.

01:23:31

**Q:** It's mentioned that AV Meyyappan directed these movies. But I've heard that he actually didn't. Did he come to the sets?

**A:** Not so. Certain things he'd teach better than everybody else.

**Q:** Even dialogues?

**A:** Yes. He would always consult with ATK and only after he approves, will carry on.

**Q:** So, you mean AVM was active on the sets.

**A:** Yes. Don't know how his sons are.

**Q :** The sons are all quite successful producers themselves. Now, in Demon Land, AT Krishnasamy had told that TA Jeyalakshmi acted as the heroine initially, but later she quit and Mangalam of Yoga-Mangalam stepped in. Can you recall?

**A :** We were in Karaikkudi and this was in Madras. I had heard that she had started to shoot, but one really did not get to know what exactly happened out there. There was no information coming our way. We were busy with our work and there was some fear also.

**Q :** Afraid to be nosey, you mean. This Vedhala Ulagam was shown on TV. But many scenes were cut as the movie was too long to accommodate the time slot.

**A :** Continuity suffers because of that. People who see such things, can't make out head or tail. If one had seen the original, one would wonder why scenes are missing. People would ask me about it and I'll just shrug it off as it's ages since I had any connection whatsoever with films.

**Q :** You played the daughter and Rajakantham was the mother.

**A :** The one is to be the son's wife turns out to be the father's spouse and some such things. There was such confusion. All I knew was that I was the younger daughter and lacking in smartness.

**Q :** Situations where you supposedly fall in love with Sarangapani and Mahalingam... You even sang a song that I remember from my school days.

**A :** Unnai summa vida maattaen (sings) I run after them singing as I'm not good at talking.

**Q :** The song I'm referring to is the one on the swing with a friend standing nearby. I remember very well.

**A :** That was Mayilaasanam. AVM had put up a huge peacock.

**Q:** Don't you remember the song, Inimaele naane rani, en kaadhalane...? (Conversation interrupted and resumes)

01:27:22

**Q:** You had mentioned somebody else was to play your role but that you replaced her. It was originally almost the role of a vamp. Did you have any particular idea about how to play the role?

**A:** Krishnan approached me with the story and enquired if I could play the role.

**Q:** Krishnasamy asked....

**A:** He also asked if I could play it like Thavamani. I responded with a 'I can play whatever role you give me. But I can't play it like Thavamani, because I'm Chellam and not Thavamani. Maybe you can get Thavamani to play like Chellam, not the other way round'.

**Q:** (laughs)

**A:** I used the same words.

**Q:** You chose to play the role as an immature one?

**A:** I said playing it that way will also ensure laughs from the audience.

**Q:** You convinced them to change it that way? Did they agree?

**A:** There was nothing to agree., otherwise I would have walked away.

**Q:** So, you did manage to put forth your view point.



**A:** Yes, always.

**Q:** You were keen on doing your part.

**A:** I was concerned that it should turn out alright, because I was no expert.

01:30:18

**Q:** You did Deiva Needhi after Demon Land.

**A:** Pullaiya's direction.

**Q:** P Pullaiya.

**A:** No idea if P or V.

**Q:** Santhakumari's husband, right?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Then it was P Pullaiya for sure. There was one C Pullaiya too. Was it a mythological one?

**A:** The story goes thus- the husband is a servant in the king's court and the wife is pregnant and they are in abject poverty. She insists on going to her paternal home much against her husband's wish and they set out on the journey through a forest. There's a storm and she is overcome by thirst. While the husband goes in search of water, an arrow from an unknown source pierces her and she lets out a loud cry and dies. The husband hears the cry and rushing back, sees a hunter around and accuses him of killing his wife. The hunter refutes the charge and they both go to the king to plead for justice. The king too is in a dilemma as the arrow that killed the wife is an old one, while what the hunter has is a new one. That night he has a dream where he's told to visit a wedding and learn for himself what the truth is. The next day, at the wedding,



suddenly two bulls appear out of nowhere, go berserk and kill the bridegroom. Obviously, this was no pre-planned murder.

**Q:** How does the story end?

**A:** That's the end. God's will prevails in the end.

**Q:** KR Ramaswamy acted as the hero.

**A:** No, Sarangapani.

**Q:** He was your pair. I remember to have read in a magazine so. Ramaswamy was not there? Who were the co-stars?

**A:** It was just the three of us.

**Q:** Maybe Ramaswamy was the bridegroom who got killed by the bull.

**A:** No, maybe the hunter.

**Q:** Because I remember reading so in a magazine.

**A:** (indistinct)

**Q:** He came in after Velaikkari.

01:35:04

**Q:** You acted with Sarangapani, can you recall anything about him?

**A:** I did.

**Q:** Was he jovial by nature?

**A:** In my opinion, he is very good. A nice man in the cine field. He'd tease me but very decent. I've done about 4,5 films with him, never has he misbehaved. No unnecessary talk. If anything he'd offer good advice about how people could be deceptive.

01:36:16

**Q:** You did Lavangi under Y V Rao's direction.

**A:** I can't seem to remember.

**Q:** It was released in 1946. Rukmini Devi who was his wife was in it. I saw it recently.

**A:** I've never faced any hurdle any time. But one particular time, the bulb kept falling three times. Rao told any woman going through her monthly cycle should exit the set.

**Q:** He said that!

**A:** Yes. And he even asked me personally about it. I told him, 'Sir, I'm here because I've taken money for the work. Otherwise, I wouldn't have. My father is in his death bed'.

**Q:** Oh, your father was ailing?

**A:** Yes, he passed away the very next day.

**Q:** Oh, soon after the shooting!

**A:** I told, 'Still I have come because I know I have just one shot and if the set has to be erected again, it'll cost much'.

**Q:** You were so duty conscious!



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**A:** Many people would give excuses by citing somebody or the other's death every now and then.

**Q:** To shirk work.

**A:** Even my brother wondered how I would manage to work. He insisted nothing would get upset if I applied for a day's leave and was going to speak to Rao himself. I told him categorically to stay out of my business and clarified I would be better off at work as work will occupy my mind. But having gone, I was quite disturbed. Even now I get disturbed if I hear anything about acquaintances.

01:39:09

**Q:** Do you remember Y V Rao?

**A:** Yes. Very quiet, won't talk to any woman.

**Q:** Because he was afraid of Rukmini?

**A:** Afraid? There'd be murder! Must have felt insecure he might latch onto somebody just as he did to her.

**Q:** (laughs) Such things happen even now.

**A:** One can't sit close by and converse the way we do now. I'll have murder to pay for!

**Q:** So much jealousy! (laughs) Can you recall your role in it? I saw some scenes of you with TR Ramachandran.

**A:** It's ages since I saw him. I've done perhaps a couple of movies with him. He too was very good. Very jovial and nice. Even on sets, very decent in conversation.

01:40:44

**Q:** You did Bhakta Jana of P Pullaiya. Ragini Films. In a magazine it was mentioned that you played the evil step mother. Do you remember?

**A:** It was just like Sakku Bai.

**Q:** Yes, hence an evil step mom!

**A:** I'm not sure if I acted in that.

**Q:** I have seen stills where it's mentioned that you rocked as the evil step mom. If It's Sakku Bai, there has to be that character, right?

**A:** But I don't remember that at all.

**Q:** Santhakumari was Sakku Bai. It was Pullaiya's own movie.

**A:** I didn't want to play such a role where a woman harasses another woman. He insisted I must. I even questioned whether I looked that kind who ill- treats. He tried to convince me saying if the audience saw an evil step- mother in me, it's an affirmation of my acting prowess.

**Q:** Pullaiya was quite correct.

**A:** He said it was easy for anyone to laugh, dance, marry and do such things; but that those kinds of roles were hard to come by and difficult to enact. (indistinct)

**Q:** In the original Sakku Bai, Banni Bai played the role of the evil step-mother. It came on TV. Aswathama had acted in it. The same story got re-made as Bhakta Jana.

**A:** There's a paucity of stories...The stories may be same, but only if the characters fit, will it be good.

01:42:57

**Q:** Around the same time, you did Mahatma Udangar under G Pattu Iyer's direction. Do you remember him?

**A:** Know him very well, he was with Subramaniam.

**Q:** He was his assistant. He was with Gemini too.

**A:** I didn't act with them. They said later to move to Bombay.

**Q:** The movie Udangar was shot there?

**A:** Who was the hero?

**Q:** Kothamangalam Seenu.

**A:** Then it was done here only.

**Q:** That's what Kothamangalam Seenu too told me. Were you a nagakanya?

**A:** You know better.

**Q:** I did a similar programme with Kothamangalam Seenu. He said that you did that role.

**A:** I remember one thing well. There's a scene where Udangar is sitting near a cauldron on fire. Gopal is the villain. There is a Raja of Bhoolok. There's a pond where the damsels from Devlok come to bathe. The Raja and the damsel meet and fall in love but the villain tries to finish him off. That scene was so difficult.

**Q:** They tied Kothamangalam Seenu to a pillar, is it?

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**A:** He was hanging from a pillar and the cauldron is below.

**Q:** A cauldron like the one they use to make Biryani? He must have turned into biryani himself. (laughs)

**A:** I felt so sorry for his plight.

**Q:** Do you remember Anjali Devi acting in it?

**A:** (indistinct)

**Q:** You don't remember...Who was the heroine? Were you the main?

**A:** That's what was told. (indistinct)

**Q:** Heard it didn't have much of a run.

**A:** The studio had a tough time.

**Q:** Which one?

**A:** Motion Pictures, the present Gemini.

**Q:** It was shot in Gemini?

**A:** Yes. Feeding the unit was quite a problem.

**Q:** So, the movie was made without much funding! (laughs) Like most pictures!

01:46:24



**Q:** Deiva Needhi, Desa Munnnetram...

**A:** People show different facets to different people, good and bad.

**Q:** Not much is known about the film Velaikkaran by Sri Valli Productions. Do you recall anything?

**A:** One can recall only if it ran.

**Q:** Oh, so it didn't run? (laughs) What kind of a movie was it? It followed Velaikkari, I suppose.

**A:** It was made on AVM's advice.

**Q:** Sri Valli Productions made it.

**A:** Vasu...

**Q:** Which Vasu?

**A:** The one who died...

**Q:** Vasu Menon? Was he associated with this film? What role did you play?

**A:** Vasu Menon only booked me for Velaikkaran. There was an incident in that film. I climb down the stairs casually when Balaiya enters and enquires if the lady of the house is in to which the reply is 'Cunning One! Don't you always turn up when the man of the house is not around? You time it so always!'. There was laughter all around. Such ribbing was quite common.

**Q:** (laughs). Balaiya was in the picture then.

**A:** And I wonder if you know about Neelakandan.

**Q:** I know him very well.

**A:** He was a big show off around women. Would ask in front of everyone, 'You seem to have forgotten me, Chellam' and I would say 'Where's the question of forgetting, when I haven't even thought of you!' and there'll be laughter all around.

**Q:** You did put him in his place! I've heard from ATK that you were quick in your retorts, especially when least expected, leaving everyone stunned.

01:49:10

**Q:** After Velaikkaran, you did Amma.

**A:** It was by Prakasam's wife.

**Q:** K S Prakash Rao's G Varalakshmi. Was Associated Productions theirs? What was your role?

**A:** I was the neighbour lady. (Indistinct) Can't remember much.

**Q:** There wasn't much buzz about it anyway. That was in 1952. You were in Rajeevi but it didn't see the light of the day, you said. What was it about?

**A:** Rajee en Kanmani? By Vasam.

**Q:** No, Rajeevi... Rajee En Kanmani was directed by KJ Mahadevan. Were you in it? What was your role?

**A:** There's a patient in a doctor's house, where I'm perhaps a servant or a

relative, not sure which.

**Q:** TR Ramachandran played the hero with a limp. Sreeranjani plays the flower girl. That's Rajee En Kanmani. There's a popular song too, Malligai Poomalai Roja...

**A:** Indeed, this is the one.

**Q:** Rajee En Kanmani created a lot of buzz. It was inspired by a film of Charlie Chaplin.

**A:** Sreeram acted in it.

**Q:** Oh, then Rajeevi must have been a different film.

**A:** He was not to be seen afterwards.

**Q:** He passed away quite early. He incurred a heavy loss when he made the film Jeeva Bhoomi. Did you act in it?

**A:** No, he booked me though, as a help.

01:51:13

**Q:** In 1954, you did Vairamalai by Sreepatha Shankar.

**A:** Manohar owes his good luck to being hit by me in the movie.

**Q:** RS Manohar...

**A:** He and Gemini ...

**Q:** Did the main roles? And you hit Manohar?

**A:** (indistinct) He repeatedly gets slapped by me. I did it as natural as I could.

**Q:** AVM would want things to be as realistic as possible?

**A:** What's that MGR studio...Somu...

**Q:** Jupiter Pictures. Paavai Vilakku was done there. Was called Neptune.

**A:** I will never let the car wait for me. I would be ready before time.

(Conversation interrupted and resumes) 01:53:05

**Q:** Vaira Malai was Sreepatha Shankar's Vaidya Films' production with AC Pillai. After that you did Kalvanin Kadhali based on Kalki's...

**A:** Can't remember whose it was.

**Q:** It was by VS Raghavan for Revathi. Sreenivasa Raghavan, an Iyengar was a sound recordist in AVM. He is no more now. Do you know him?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Shivaji and Bhanumathi acted in it.

**A:** Not Bhanumathi.

**Q:** She was the heroine. That too was shown on TV. What was your role?

**A:** I was the wife of the police inspector.

**Q:** Sarangapani's wife.

**Q:** I saw it on TV. The story by Kalki came as a serial novel in Ananda Vikatan, later adapted for stage with SD Sundaram's writing. Do you remember VS Raghavan who made it for Revathi Films?

**A:** He was our relative.

**Q:** He was originally a sound recordist with AVM. He was related to you?

**A:** A distant relative.

**Q:** I've heard ATK speak highly of him as a sound recordist. He quit the film industry way before I came in, so I am not familiar with him. I only know his younger brother and son-in-law. The son-in-law Jagannathan is a recordist in studio. I've heard from ATK that VS Raghavan was the pioneer in dubbing films from one language to another. It seems AVM had maintained that the Kannada movie Harischandra could not be dubbed into Tamil, but he did it and showed how it was indeed possible. And that later even Ramrajya was dubbed.

**A:** They were certainly the experts. 99% of the ones you find today in the field are all ...

**Q:** from AVM?

**A:** Whether actors or technicians.

**Q:** It was the place that nurtured.

**A:** He was always on the lookout for talent and all was decent.

**Q:** Kalvanin Kadhali was made in Revathi Studios?

**A:** Vauhini, perhaps.

**Q :** Now it's called Vauhini. But now there's no studio, instead they have the Chandamama Press. You won't be able to recognise the place now, it has changed much.

**A:** I can't make out much anyway.

01:56:05

**Q :** You did yet another film Mangayar Thilagam under Vaidya Films of AC Pillai. LV Prasad directed and it starred Shivaji and Padmini. Do you remember? A couple of years back it was played on TV.

**A:** Was it good?

**Q:** Yes. It had won some awards too.

**A:** I don't remember anything at all.

**Q:** You did Panakkaari in 1953.

**A:** You mentioned something yesterday.

**Q:** Anna Karenina. It had MG Ramachandran, TR Rajakumari...

**A:** Panthulu...

**Q:** What was your role?

**A:** Wife of...(Indistinct)



**Q:** I remember, I was in school... (Conversation interrupted and resumes) 01:57:00

**Q:** We were talking about the 1953 film Panakkaari by Uma Pictures of Ramanathan Chettiyar. It was adapted from Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. You play the wife of the Princess' brother.

**A:** I advise the Princess against her romantic liaison as she is married and a mother already.

**Q :** But she pays no heed and TR Rajakumari played the Princess and MG Ramachandran is her lover. Do you remember the film?

**A:** No.

**Q:** I suppose you didn't even see the film as you don't watch films.

**A:** I don't step out much. (Indistinct) My brother used to say I came into films by chance and just to look after my kids, and that otherwise, I was a misfit in this field.

**Q:** (laughs), that's what your brother felt.

01:58:34

**Q :** Afterwards you did Jatagam, by Nagendra Rao. In Kannada it was named Jataka Phala. Can you recall that film?

**A:** It was quite amusing.

**Q:** Why so?

**A:** For the Kannada version, I had to mouth Kannada dialogues written in Tamil script.

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**Q:** There was no dubbing artist, you had to speak the dialogues yourself?

**A:** He too acted.

**Q:** Nagendra Rao? Was it a comedy?

**A:** I might have understood the story then, but now because of the time lapse, I can't say.

**Q:** Yes, it was in 53, a lapse of nearly 36 years.

**A:** I can't seem to remember after just 35 minutes!

**Q:** (laughs)

**A:** More so because of my poor health.

**Q:** Naturally.

01:59:52

**Q:** The film Penn that you did, wasn't it by AVM?

**A:** It has...(indistinct)

**Q:** Vaijayantimala?

**A:** No, Rajakumari.

**Q :** It doesn't have Rajakumari. It has Vaijayantimala, Gemini Ganesan, Anjali Devi, Chandrababu,S Balachander. What role did you play?

**A:** The mother's role.

**Q:** Vaijayantimala's mother?

**A;** Generally concerned about getting the daughter married...(indistinct)

**Q:** Doesn't look like the film had a good run, was it successful?

**A:** Not at all.

02:01:12

**Q :** After that your movie was Paavai Vilakku based on Akhilan's famous novel. AP Nagarajan...

**A:** There were many woman characters in that. I play Kamala's mother.

**Q:** Kumari Kamala.

**A:** My character in the movie is a great artiste of the past and the daughter is asked how she is no patch on her mother by...

**Q:** Shivaji Ganesan?

**Q:** Did you ever watch the movie in full?

**A:** There will be time just to work and pack up.

**Q:** Where was it shot?

**A:** At Newtowne. I watched only Kalvanin Kadhali.

**Q:** Do you remember Shivaji Ganesan in the movie.

**A:** No.

**Q:** He sings a song Vanna Thamizh Penn Oruthi En Edhiril Vandhaal like a normal speech style. It was very famous.

**A:** Must have been shot outdoors.

**Q:** Do you remember AP Nagarajan in that? He later on became a famous director.

**A:** Wasn't it Ramanathan?

**Q:** No. AP Nagarajan was the director of Paavai Vilakku.

**A:** But he only booked me.

**Q:** But AP Nagarajan only directed it. Was Ramanath supposed to direct it?

**A:** Or was it Ratnam?

**Q:** He died quite early. I don't think many were aware that Ramnath was to direct it initially.

**A:** The way a movie turns out if it had Ramnath in it, is different from how it is, if it's by someone else.

**Q:** Of course. Towards the end he did a movie by name Viduthalai, were you in it? He ran into difficulties during its time and there were some court cases too. By the end of it, he passed away. Quite at a young age. Do you remember him? He was a director with Gemini. He was short and be-spectacled.

**A:** A very nice man, but not suited for the world of cinema.

**Q:** Many feel the same about him, though he was a learned man.

**A:** He was a man of few words. Always very brief in his speech.

**Q:** Just sit with arms folded quietly.

**A:** Very patient.

**Q:** Shekhar was with him.

**A:** (Indistinct)

02:04:30

**Q:** We've so far managed to speak about your tenure in film from 35 to 60, a span of about 25 years. In 1935, when you stepped into the film industry, situations were of a particular style including techniques. You've mentioned how one had to stay under the sun during the shoot.

**A:** I do wish to share something.

**Q:** Please do.

**A:** Things have improved a lot now.

**Q:** You think so?

**A:** Yes, cameras, cinematography...but the story angle...

**Q:** Hasn't grown you feel.

**A:** If only the story department too grows, then we'll be the best. The movies are made very well.

**Q:** How was the aspect of make-up, during those days?

**A:** (indistinct)

**Q:** Did it take much time to put on make-up?

**A :** Much time will go in make-up, then in bathroom, then in fights. Only in the remaining time, film will get done.

**Q:** Was that so? Only in the left-over time, actin g will be done?

**A:** One had to travel all the way to Newtowne.

**Q:** In Kilpauk?

**A:** Only Later Gemini came about here.

**Q :** Until then films were shot in Kilpauk? Were you acquainted with Jiten Banerjee, Dinshaw, Nagoor in Newtowne Studio?

**A:** We were all colleagues from the time of Balayogini. Subramanyam brought him over here.



**Q:** Subramanyam brought over Jiten Banerjee? Do you remember him?

**A:** I think his son too is a director?

**Q:** Jiten Banerjee's son? Do you know his name?

**A:** They were very genial with good artistes.

**Q:** Do you recall Dinshaw, sound recordist?

**A:** Yes, he was in Sagar Movietone. That was when I had just entered the industry and they used to refer to me as the new one.

**Q:** Do you remember Nagoor? He was the art director at Newtowne. Later on, he also made movies like Gnanasundari, Kudumba Vilakku.F Nagoor. He was a famous art director. He was one of the founders of Newtowne.

**A:** (Indistinct) I didn't watch movies.

02:08:13

**Q:** You've acted under many directors. With K Subramaniam, you did Balayogini. Can you share anything about him?

**A:** Of course. He was capable of turning even a twig into a great artiste.

**Q:** Oh, he was that great?

**A:** Let's say I couldn't get a particular scene or dialogue right. Instead of getting angry, he'd be so deft in getting the right performance out with his smooth ways.

**Q:** He was so encouraging.

**A:** Not just that. While we were shooting in Calcutta, he too was staying with us in the same house.

**Q:** And SD Subbulakshmi too?

**A:** And he'll even supervise meal times. Subbulakshmi too. Even now, at home, you'll find his family to be so as well.

**Q:** While directing, will he enact and show or leave it to your own self?

**A:** I remember an occasion after Madras Mail, I think. I was walking with a limp and at one point would not step ahead. He comforted me by saying I need not fear, I was walking alright indeed. I was supposed to climb down the stairs looking for my daughter.

**Q:** That must be Baby Saroja.

**A:** I kept looking at my saree pallu and he jokingly asked If had dropped some coins tied up in the pallu?

**Q:** (laughs)

**A:** I didn't even know to say sorry. I told him I would do a second take.

**Q:** So, he would teach by encouraging...

**A:** (Indistinct)

02:10:58

**Q:** What about AV Meyyappan? How would he teach acting?

**A:** He won't teach, but sit around. If things don't go right, he'll just turn his face away.

**Q:** To show his displeasure?

**A:** We'll know things have gone wrong. But if things go fine, he'll be all smiles. With me though, there was no such thing as wrong and right.

**Q:** Looks like you'd get it right always.

**A:** Not that way. It all depended on the way the assistant directors teach you.

(Conversation is interrupted and resumes) 02:11:58

**Q:** We were talking about AVM. Yet another famous director you worked under was SS Vasana. He produced Madanakamarajan that BN Rao directed. You had already shared some information about Vasana. Can you add to it?

**A:** He was very particular about food and was very caring and concerned about the food served on the sets. There were no tables, yet he too would join us while eating and see to it that we were served well.

**Q:** I do think he was a foodie especially about coffee. To my knowledge, he was a connoisseur of coffee.

**A:** There'll always be a sweet.

**Q:** Oh, they'll give sweets?

**A:** I mean, as part of the menu itself. He was very particular about feeding well. If at all any item was missed, it must be because of oversight and nothing else. And he'll have it corrected. Very decent that way.

02:13:22

**Q:** Were you acquainted with Kothamangalam Subbu who was with Vasan in Gemini?

**A:** How can one not know of him?

**Q:** He acted with you in Suryaputri.

**A:** Once the shot got over, we all will go our separate ways.

**Q:** No association beyond the sets, you mean. No socializing.

**A:** There was no time for all that. (indistinct). I'll reach there and go straight to the make-up room and Hari Babu would be there.

**Q:** Hari Babu, the make-up specialist.

**A:** He did the make-up for me in Balayogini.

**Q:** For Balayogini, was he the make-up specialist? He was brought in from Calcutta?

**A:** Everyone- Kamal Ghosh...

**Q:** Kamal Ghosh the camera man.

**A:** The camera man, Sailen Bose.

**Q:** Sailen Bose, Jothi Sinha recordist.

**A:** All were brought in from there.

**Q:** How well do you remember Hari Babu? Was he good at putting on make- up?

**A:** He liked his job, he liked it even more if the artiste had a good face-cut. If one didn't have good looks, what can the poor man do?

**Q:** (laughs)

**A:** (indistinct)

**Q:** So, you were familiar with Hari Babu from the time of Balayogini.

**A:** He was very focussed on work.

**Q:** Very strict and professional?

**A:** No nonsense kind of person.

02:15:19

**Q:** You had done two movies -Suryaputri and Meera-with Ellis R Dungan. Can you recollect anything about him?

**A:** He too was good. But I didn't know English and he didn't know Tamil. So, all communication was indirect. Even acting...

**Q:** Would he act and show?

**A:** Yes, either that or he would tell others to show. Even Moylan...they were all soft-spoken. No hassles whatsoever on the sets. There was so much respect for directors and producers more than artistes.

**Q:** Directors and producers commanded such awe.

**A:** It was like a Gurukul. Not like how it is now-a-days.



**Q:** That's true.

**A:** There was no such thing as waiting.

**Q:** Yes, no question of waiting for an artiste to arrive.

**A:** Right away cancelled!

**Q:** The artiste will be changed at once! One has to be there well in time?

**A:** No mincing words here. 'You are getting paid by the hour and if you are late, do you know how it shoots up the studio rent and production cost? Why can't you get ready on time and be here?', they'll ask bluntly, no matter who the artiste was.

**Q:** Obviously those were not the times when the artistes had the upper hand. **A:** Yes, but that's why I was surprised that they were wary of me, because... **Q:** You would give it as good as you got (laughs). ATK has told me.

**A:** They'll warn people of my repartees.

**Q:** You'll never get into controversies that way.

**A:** Where is a chance for a controversy with me? (indistinct) I had such a long hair that TA Madhuran used to feel envious.

**Q:** You talk of TA Madhuran. What about NS Krishnan?

**A:** There's no way one can talk to the man alone, with the wife around. They may talk normally otherwise, but not when the wife is around. The cinema wives tend to think all women are out to get their men!



**Q:** That feeling is very much there even today. Hasn't changed.

**A:** How will it change, it's in the psyche? (indistinct)

**Q:** Have you acted with NS Krishnan?

**A:** He played the temple priest once. Him playing that role had me in splits. You'll find sanitation workers, beggars dressed in clothes with Zari; dress and character found no match at all.

**Q :** How was the costume scene? Was the costume in keeping with the role? Or sometimes one sees a rickshaw puller wearing a shiny costume.

**A:** Or after a fight scene one would turn up with not a hair out of place.

**Q:** And with the shirt not creased a bit, as though neatly ironed. Was it like that then?

**A:** Indeed so. (indistinct)

**Q :** Was everyone into wearing wigs? One sees all lady artistes seen having long hair. How's it even possible? Why such a fad? One finds all lady actresses wearing a wig.

**A:** I have no clue as one can't enter the make-up room when somebody is in.

**Q :** But couldn't you have made out when they step out? Now, it's more or less the fashion.

02:20:52

**Q:** Currently, love scenes are picturized differently. How was it then?



||ntai||

**A:** A lot different from the running and chasing done now. I haven't done much myself.

**Q:** But you might have seen on the set?

**A:** Just talking or acting coy perhaps.

**Q:** (laughs)

**A :** Though it may not really look like a blush. Like showing anger. There's huge difference in the actual emotion and faking the emotion.

02:22:15

**Q:** What changes have you seen from the time you entered and left the film industry in the 25 years from 35 to 60?

**A:** I had no clue I would change.

**Q:** Not about you, but the field. Was it strict discipline then?

**A :** Indeed! Much like a Gurukul. At the given time, one ought to be present in the hall, completely ready and rehearsals would begin.

**Q:** There would be rehearsals for every scene in every movie? Just as in a stage drama?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Attendance was compulsory?

**A:** Yes. If one can't be present, one had to explain the reason why. Not only that, there's no question of hanging around here and there. Since food will be provided on the set itself, everyone will stick to their time and retire to a corner when not required to be

around. Especially with big names like Raja Chandrashekhar, AVM, Vasan, there was dignity all around. Not so anymore.

**Q:** would you say, there's less respect now?

**A:** I say it's completely reduced. Vulgar comments and innuendos abound. One feels like throwing the footwear on them.

**Q:** They may do so even deliberately.

**A:** Yes. (indistinct)

**Q:** All in all, no discipline anymore?

**A:** None at all.

**Q:** People show off now?

**A :** People assume greatness just because they play the king, say on the screen. Delusional.

**Q:** Were you acquainted with Serukalathur Sama?

**A:** No. But I've heard that he appreciated my acting.

**Q:** But you had not acted with him?

**A:** He had left by the time I joined.

**Q :** But in Meera, he played a double role. One was as the father of Meera as a child. Maybe you did not have any scene with him.

(Conversation interrupted and resumes) 02:25:50

**Q:** We were talking about Serukalathur Sama. You don't remember him...

**A:** More than that, I didn't know him.

**Q:** Were not acquainted with him?

**A:** He was a well-known artiste. Sang Radhe unakku Kobam Aagadhadee.

**Q:** That was sung by Bhagavathar.

**A:** Wasn't it by him then?

**Q:** No. He sang Nadagame Ulagam Naalai Nadappadhai Yaar Arivaar, the famous song. And he played Kanva Maharishi in Shakuntalai. He sang Mannanukke Uraippeer. You didn't play in Shakuntalai, but he was there in Meera. Do you remember Appa Duraisamy? He too was in Meera and always in the company of Nagaiya. Anyway, he's no more. Do you remember Nagaiya?

**A:** Whenever we met, he'd be the one to greet first. I used to think I should always beat him to it, but didn't happen so. I didn't have time to learn such social niceties. All one knew was to fall at people's feet as a mark of respect.

**Q:** He played your brother the Rana in Meera.

**A:** Was afraid of him.

**Q:** Why?

**A:** (indistinct)

**Q:** Were you afraid looking at his figure, because he had quite a gigantic frame?

**A:** (Indistinct). When I say afraid, I mean more out of respect.

02:27:47

**Q:** In 1937, you did Bhakta Tulasidas and you had mentioned you did some romantic scenes and songs with MK Radha. Can you throw more light on it? Was it a duet or a solo?

**A:** Duet. I've forgotten most of it, I'm trying because you are asking, it may not be even half correct.

**Q:** It's alright, go ahead.

**A:** (sings)

**Q:** Did Radha sing in his own voice?

**A:** (sings) This portion is sung by him. I've forgotten.

**Q:** What's the scene like? You just keep walking as you sing?

**A:** They are seated on a swing and holding hands.

**Q:** Your role was like a vamp?

**A:** Not like a vamp, but indeed a vamp.

**Q:** The heroine was played by Sabita Devi, right?

**A:** She didn't like anything about me- my acting, my singing nor my long hair.

**Q:** Where was she from?

**A:** From this place only.

**Q:** From Tamil Nadu you mean? She doesn't seem to have many movies afterwards.

**A:** Then and even now, whether alive or dead...

**Q:** No one seems to know any news about her. I suppose that was the only film she did, no news at all about her.

**A:** (Indistinct) the director was a friend.

**Q:** Who?

**A:** The one came in with Vasantha Kokilam.

**Q:** NC Vasantha Kokilam? Saachi?

**A:** Yes, Saachi.

**Q:** Saachi brought in Sabitha Devi? Were you acquainted with Vasantha Kokilam?

**A:** Knew her.

**Q:** But not very familiar?

**A:** Yes, not acquainted. But was crazy about her songs.



**Q:** She was not a friend?

**A:** How to be friends? We lived in different places.

**Q:** You mean, there weren't opportunities to meet and greet?

**A:** We lived in our respective places and I didn't know to use buses to travel. Even now, I don't know such things.

**Q:** You are not habituated to step out much.

02:30:36

**Q:** The first film that you did in 1935 Kausalya- was it shot in Thirukazhukkundram in front of a temple. You used to be sitting on the steps?

**A:** I beg there. (sings and later hums)

**Q:** It's 54 years since that film. It was shot outdoors at the steps of the temple?

**A:** No counting the number of coins that were collected on the plate!

**Q:** Oh, the onlookers gave alms!

**A:** There was quite a crowd.

**Q:** They had gathered to watch the film shooting?

**A:** They didn't know it was a shooting.

**Q:** Then they thought you to be really singing.

**A:** There were whispers that poor girl had to beg despite her beauty!

**Q:** It was so authentic, they gave alms! That's interesting.

**A:** Many cried.

**Q:** Oh, did they?

**A:** I still haven't got my voice back.

02:33:23

**Q:** If there's anything more you wish to share, please go ahead.

**A:** Which movie exactly are you asking about?

**Q :** I mean generally. You've been answering my questions in the course of our discussion. Would you wish to add anything more? About your songs, overall experience...

**A :** If one earns 5000 rupees, one may adorn his wife with diamonds. But a woman whose husband earns just 5 rupees can't afford to have same expectations, can she?

**Q:** Certainly not.

**A :** Secondly, there's still discord in the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law.

**Q:** It is so in every household.

**A:** If a woman loves her husband genuinely, she should be cordial with her mother-in-law for begetting a son like her husband. The mother-in-law too should treat her like a daughter.

**Q:** Neither feel that way.

**A:** A family can thrive only if both feel that mutually. (indistinct)

**Q:** So, you want films to show such morals?

**A:** Yes. (indistinct)

**Q:** You wish films to teach morals?

**A:** And if the husband brings flowers and gives to the mother, the mother should pass it on to the daughter-in-law and she too should do as told. If both have such mutual understanding how happy they all can be!

**Q:** You want films to be made focussing on such congeniality?

**A:** (Indistinct)

**Q:** (laughs) What kind of films do you want made?

**A:** Women should be brave and they should be respected in public and not be the butt of comments. All earnings of a woman are used up by men. Instead, there should be a provision in law for her earnings to be kept separate and to be used as per her wish. Both should contribute towards the family and they should have proper communication in these matters, otherwise there will be unnecessary quarrels.

**Q:** You want moral, ethical purposes in films.

**A:** Yes. The reason why I say all this is, because the current crop of girls and actresses are smart, unlike me.

**Q:** You mean they act well?

**A:** Yes, they do. They should reduce violence...

**Q:** You want less violence and vulgarity.

**A:** Within limits. The extent of fighting we see in films, is scary. Despite being from the same field, I worry for the safety of the actors.

**Q:** (Laughs) Your take is for movies to have morals. You've spent much of your time these 2,3 days sharing your experiences from then and now in detail, answering my questions, singing songs and all. Given your frail condition, I suppose I have troubled you quite a bit. However, I'm glad about your shared thoughts. I'm sure they will be of much use to the current as well as future generations. Even foreigners are studying the history of our films and without a doubt, this kind of interviews will go a long way. I'm very touched and beholden to you for co-operating with us that despite the heat and indifferent health.

**A:** What big words! I have forgotten half the things and I am also not interested. But it was so nice of you to take interest, reach out and explain patiently the purpose and the benefit of this interview and also put up with my nonsensical demeanour in the process. I should be the one thankful.

**Q:** Not at all, it was all interesting and my pleasure and privilege.

02:39:32

That was the interview with KR Chellam, leading Tamil heroine of the 1930s; late 1930s and the 1940s and later well-known character actress of Tamil Cinema. Her films like

Vanaraja Karzan made in Bombay by the Wadia Brothers in which she acted opposite John Kawas the well-known stunt hero of the Hindi films of that period and other films like Adhrishtam or Luck in Tamil (both of course in Tamil) directed by the writer-director SDS Yogi and her earlier film made in 1936, Madras Mail, made in Bombay at the Mohan Studio-Ramniklal Mohanlal Studio at Andheri I believe, the oldest studio in the business I suppose, in which she acted with an old action hero of South India called Battling Mani- totally forgotten today and also that ebullient effervescent comedian-stuntman of that era SS Kokko, a very familiar name to the movie goers of that period, but sadly forgotten today. All these films in which KR Chellam played the major or the main role are remembered by the old-timers even today. Mrs Chellam who is a heart patient and has been one for years leads a totally retired life at her residence in Madras very well looked after indeed by her doctor daughter Dr.KR Ambujam Devi. Chellam never goes out, rarely meets people outside her family circle and it was indeed a pleasant pleasurable meeting I have had with this very fine lady of charm, of old-world manners, of values which are fast dying today in this commercial world. She is now in her late 70s and continues to spend her evening of the life very quietly, thinking of the past memorable days I suppose talking to her two daughters, grand children and other relations and of course watching television whenever there is an interesting programme on it. This is Randor Guy saying, Good Bye Mrs. KR Chellam at the end of the interview with her which took place at her residence in Madras, during the month of May, 1989.