



National Film Archive of India

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Interview of well-known director-producer Kovelamudi Surya Prakash Rao alias KS Prakash

Mr. K.S. Prakash Rao started his career in 1940 as a Telugu actor and he belonged to Gudavalli Ramabrahmam and company. Patni in 1942, he started his acting with Ruhsyendramani and earlier, he appeared in Apavadu with Lakshmi Rajyam. These two films brought out an apparent actor. He worked with LV Prasad in Drohi, LV Prasad the director, in 1948. Later, graduating to direction in 1950, Mr. Prakash Rao brought out his first film Modati Ratri in which G. Varalakshmi and Narayana Rao were the leading couple. Prakash Rao became a well-known figure in the Telugu cinema industry. Recently, Prakash Rao recalled his career in the field and reminisced over the years down the lane.

Over to Prakash Rao

Interviewer : Tell us how you entered the film industry? Have you undergone any training? Who introduced you to the industry?

Prakash Rao : Initially, I was into insurance wing. I also used to be involved in a little bit of social and political activities. I used to watch films. Malapilla, Rythu Bidda, Maradalu gave me a lot of encouragement. But I never thought of entering the film industry. It was Ramabrahmam garu who forced me to make a foray into the industry. He is a distant relative of mine. It was not due to passion that I came into the film industry. In the beginning, I did not prefer to come into the industry. I did not prefer because an advocate from Kadapa, I don't remember his name, and

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Venktateswara Rao garu did not achieve much in their life even after entering the film industry. But heroines who knew nothing could make name in the film industry at that time. So, I thought I too will have to go back home without achieving much in my life and so did not accept to get into the industry. However, Ramabrahmam garu said that I would do something else. Soon after bringing me into the industry, he gave me a role but at the same time, entrusted me with some office work. He gave accounts, collections, assistance and other work. In Sarathi Studios, I was more into office work only. I did acting too but it was very negligible, only when there was a call sheet. Also, I was never interested in acting.

Interviewer : Do you remember Apavadu days? Can you tell us about any incident in those days?

Prakash Rao : My first film was Apavadu and then, I did Patni. I did not know what I did in the movie. I was 6.5 foot and my heroine was 4.5 ft. Whenever they shot a song or any other scene with both of us together in that movie, I used to be made to sit on a chair and she used to stand beside me (to avoid showing the difference in height). When the height difference would show on the screen, they used to place stools and ask us to stand on them. In those days, that was the technical equipment. In Patni, I acted with Rushyendramani and it was a folklore film. Our couple used to be good. That movie was based on Kannagi's character. In Tamil, it was shot on Kannamba garu. The film was shot simultaneously in Telugu and Tamil. In Tamil, they shot the film based on the history written in the book but in Telugu, we added some aesthetic values to the story.

Interviewer : Can we get a copy of Patni movie in the market?

Prakash Rao : You can get it from Sarathi Studios.

Interviewer : We want to put it in the archives. The archives people asked for it.

Prakash Rao : There is nothing special about the movie.

Interviewer : You and Rushyendramani garu acted. That is enough.

Prakash Rao : Later, I plunged into movies seriously. I, Gopichand and some other

people worked together and all of us had the influence of MM Rai on us. I, Kodavarti Subba Rao and others became close. I had their encouragement too and it made me settle in movies.

Interviewer : What was the reason for Gudavalli Ramabrahmam garu who started off with Rythu Bidda and Mala Pilla switching to Patni and Mayalokam? Why did he switch from serious films to commercial films?

Prakash Rao : If I have to tell you the truth, apart from being patrons of art, cinema also means business. Business suffered a lot due to Rythu Bidda. Mala Pilla made a good show and the ruckus created over the movie between Brahmins and other castes, helped the movie run for a more period. Later, Rythu Bidda came and it failed. Not all pictures of Bhavani Studios were hit. In the political film category, many remained unsuccessful. However, Y.V. Rao garu's Malli Pelli was a hit. Rao himself was an actor. Handsome. Kanchanamala. He used to have a penchant for comedy. May be, these factors affected Malli Pelli. This helped the movie run for a longer time. At times, I feel this comedy spoilt the prospects of Sumangali. Movies became a neglected industry. Neither did the social renaissance people wanted the medium nor the politicians wanted it. The Communists in fact branded it as a medium of the elite section and I used to tell that cinema is a powerful industry which will have impact on people and that they can't keep it like an alien. At that time licensing system and there used to be some political and governmental restrictions because all the film was imported. I was a novice and so was not given license. Then I and Gopichand said that we would picturize a movie on the idea of 'grow more concept'. At that time, there used to be an agricultural movement bhodan movement led by Bezawada Ramachandra Reddy. We approached them and secured the license. It was not given to us. Meanwhile, Sarathi people came to us telling that they were not using their license and asked us to direct a movie with that license. We started Gruha Pravesam. I was the producer for it. Prasad garu came from Mumbai and he was the director. Gopi Chand should have been the director for the movie but seeing Prasad's capacity, Gopi Chand said let Prasad direct the movie and that's how he became the director of the movie. This movie made me get involved in the film industry, leaving the insurance wing. I forgot the

insurance wing by this time. And as you know, the industry sucks everyone into its flow. You acted as a doctor in Drohi, a film directed by L.V. Prasad. For the first time, you acted with G. Varalakshmi in this movie. Later, you directed Modati Ratri with G. Varalakshmi.

Interviewer : Tell us about Drohi.

Prakash Rao : By the time of Drohi, my familiarity with incidents of political and social activities helped a lot. Some people raised objection that the title 'Drohi' was 'anti' but we managed to douse the argument. I used to discuss my topics with Narla Krishna, Chakrapani, Gopichand, Kodavarisetti Kutumba rao garu and then approve. Now, there is no time. In the past, we used to have time. After writing the story, we used to take 6 months before picturizing it. At that time, I doubt if at least 10 movies were released in a year. The speed film industry is having now-a-days was not there then. We used to review everything and then only get into the project. Naidu garu wrote the dialogues. Content and story were mine. My views and Tapi Dharma Rao Naidu's used to be similar. So, I and he together shared thoughts but he wrote the script. In that film, we highlighted the political conditions in the country.

Interviewer : So, you have knowledge of script writing?

Prakash Rao : No, only the content and story was mine. I told you that I dabbled in political activities before coming to film industry and it helped me.

Interviewer : How did you feel after entering film industry from insurance wing? How did you feel seeing the premises? What was your immediate reaction?

Prakash Rao : I did not feel like having entered into a different field. I did not think it is something great. I told you that Ramabrahmam garu brought me into the field. He was more a journalist than a film man. He too was involved in social activities. He used to move about with government officials whenever they visited Madras, invite them to his office. At that time, one Raj Kumar became the chief justice and Ramabrahmam garu felicitated him. He never used to mingle with the cinema people. Even the Vahini Studios people never used to think they were not from the film industry. They probably felt that they were from the cultural field. But Y.V.

Rao and Narasimha Reddy used to think that they were from the film industry. Because Ramabrahmam garu felt that he is a man from the society, I never felt I stepped into an alien land. From Drohi, some differences cropped up between us. In production, several things depend on discretion. What I liked might not be preferred by my partners. The casting or writer which I like might not be liked by my partner. There will be many things that depend on personal discretion in production and there will be chances for differences. It is for the same reason that each company got divided into three companies. It is the same even now. Every human being moves ahead based on his perceptions and emotions. There can be no such situation where one people's choices will be given importance when his financial stake is not more in a particular firm.

Interviewer : Satyam Reddy and B.N. Reddy garu too parted ways for the same reason.

Prakash Rao : Yes. I set up my own production house. We started from Modati Ratri in 1950. I played the villain role in it. Till then, a villain was picturised as a monster or demon in movies. A villain need not be devilish in physical appearance. In fact, the villainy in a person does not necessarily reflect in the outward appearance. I feel it is necessary to appear as a noble man and so, acted accordingly. That film was an average grosser. I was the villain and Narayana Rao was the hero.

Interviewer : From Modati Ratri, you directed the movies. Did your mentor's influence you in your direction?

Prakash Rao : I do not believe in a guru-sishya relationship in movies. The biggest guru is our screen. We keep watching movies every now and then, even this teaches us a lot. No human being can teach something more than what a screen does. Many people say I am their guru but I do not believe in it. Ramabrahmam garu once said that the title assistant director should in fact be changed to 'assistant to director'. A person can be called assistant director only if we are sure that he would become a director from the next movie. In fact, we even showed 'assistant to director' title in some movies. In those days, there used to be some value for talent and capacity. I could not find suitable directors for my films and Prasad garu also became busy.

So, I became the director. After Modati Ratri, we took Deeksha, an adaptation of Sarathchandra Chaterjee's novel. In the novel, a woman shows immense love towards a boy whom she adopts. She even fails to correct him even if he is wrong. In my film, I tried to change the concept and say that unconditional love is wrong and that the woman should correct the boy. Sarathchandra Chaterjee was of the opinion that motherly love would tolerate all misdoings by their progeny, but I wanted to say that real love should try to correct the mistakes of their children. As the attitude got changed, I did not give acknowledgement to the novelist. I changed the characterization and treatment. Except the plot, my film was quite opposite of what was written in the novel. I removed some characters too. I gave the title Deeksha with an idea that commitment and determination, anything could be achieved. The commitment of the woman is in changing the adopted son and his determination starts after having changed his ways. In this film, there is no hero, heroine or a comedian. My distributors wrote anonymous letters to me saying that the concept of the film was not good. I handed over all the letters to Dharma Rao Naidu asking him to look into the objections but yet retain the concept of the film. Later, Athreya also joined us as the lyricist. For the first time, he began writing lyrics with my film. When I approached him, he refused in the first instance, but I told him that I want prose poetry and then he wrote "Pora babu po". Tappante eppudo manninchedi--Piriki vedhavala paripoyi vacchanu.. these are the lyrics in one of the song and were appreciated by many. All these aspects pooled up and the film was a success because many people admired it, saying that it was exemplary output by a young director, in his first attempt. I remade the same movie in Tamil too but the actors were different.

Interviewer : Who are the actors in both the films?

Prakash Rao : In Telugu, it was Madhavapeddi Ramakrishna's brother who played the role of the young boy. In Tamil, the same role was played by Setu. I saw him at a cinema hall and learnt that he was the son of a hotel owner. I had a problem as I shot the films simultaneously. Because both of the lads were young, I feared that one would get discouraged if we praise the other. So, for two months, we had rehearsals in the evening for all the kids. I used to take them to the beach and make them get

closer. At the same time, I also ensured that they would not get scared seeing me. Both the kids used to have a discussion. Ramakrishna's brother used to say that there was no need of hotels while the Tamil boy used to contend that there was every need of such places. I used to take Telugu first and then Tamil. Both of them never followed the other. If the Telugu boy used to perform well, the Tamil boy used to ask for reshooting so that he can act better. Later, in 1954 or so, I shot Balanandam with 300 kids, making them stand in 16,000-feet distance. We used to bring all the children from the schools in vans in the evening and then shoot our film. Before the government thought of any children's movie, I made a movie with children. After that, I shot Kartika Puranam. I suffered loss with that movie.

Interviewer : Why did you suffer loss with Karthika Puranam?

Prakash Rao : There are many reasons. By that time, the concept of hero and heroine got formulated and because my movie did not have that, people did not watch it. It only had children. One other important reason is every subject needs to be introduced to the audience in a particular technique. My distributor did not give me that chance.

Interviewer : So, distributors played a key role in promotion of films at that time itself?

Prakash Rao : Yes. Since the beginning, distributors' influence was there for films. Nobody would make films with their own money, neither in the past nor in the present. If one produces a film with his own money, they will not be able to survive for long in the industry. We can count on fingers the number of producers who made films with their own money every time. These days, many of the producers are technicians from the film industry itself. Either two assistant producers or two assistant directors are getting together for a film and then breaking up. Nothing is organized in films. The government is also not doing for improving the conditions in film industry. In Russia, after completing BA, there is a specialized course in filmmaking for 4-5 years. Do we have such a facility in India? Because there is no such rule, only those who are attracted by the field remained in it. This is the condition of the film industry now. Poona Institute did contribute a lot for the

technical advancement and acting in the film industry. In India, some people keep boasting that they studied and got trained in acting somewhere but I feel there is something to learn and study before you want to teach to something to other person. There is no such facility in the Indian film industry. In fact, a director has to know about psychology, various societies in the world, social renaissances to take a film but he does not anything about them. If he starts reading about them, it will take him a lifetime. He can't do all that but somehow, the show is being run.

Interviewer : Can you tell us about the importance of music in your films.

Prakash Rao : All regional films need the elements of comedy, romance, music and dances. The audience and scope of getting the money back is less but there is a lot of expenditure. A film has to attract audiences with different tastes. In a 12,000-ft film roll, 3,000-ft is for songs, 2,000-ft each for comedy and fights and then what is the space left for a story. In those days, screenplay gained more importance than the story. There are people who weaved epics around a very small issue. Similarly, in the film industry too, directors began understanding that a small issue can be taken and shot into a full-length film. Such an awareness came in regional films. A story need not be like a Kasi Majili story which is very long. In art films, there is not much importance for a story. It is more like a documentary. Cinema is just a business and we have to understand that. Yes, the government itself acknowledged the fact that filmmaking is an industry. The National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) just keeps summoning that it had come into existence to shoot good films. The film organizations are mired in lies. All film personalities, writers or musicians or others, have earned money through films but not through other means. Each lyricist is charging anything between Rs 5,000-Rs 10,000. Be it any wing, anybody in that wing would not have been better if they had gone into some other field. Take from junior artiste to senior artiste and assistant director to director, they have earned in the same industry. You know how much we pay for a boy? Rs 30 per day plus beta and all other conditions are granted.

Interviewer : What are the changes in the working conditions in the film industry, from Modati Ratri till now?

Prakash Rao : Be it any time, all those involved in the films have started living better in the industry than in their earlier careers. In the past, junior artistes used to be called extras. I was the first person who introduced that these people also should be given lunch and conveyance charges, apart from their remuneration, after launching Prakash Productions. Take Drohi, Prasad garu, me, Prabhakar Rao, Siva Rao, Rallabandi, we five pooled up Rs 2,500 each and booked actors for monthly salaries. For making the film, it took us some time and we had to pay them more. However, we did not regret for giving them more. We restricted our share of profit. For each heroine, we paid Rs 5,000. I think that was the lowest ever paid to heroes or heroines. Even the side characters were paid a good amount. Now, everything is commercialized. After the launch of the trade union, drivers and boys are well placed. Their unions are very strong. If anybody should become a boy, he must pay Rs 5,000 and take an identity card. Then only he should be employed by us. They went to such an extent that my own servant can't serve me food. They have gone to some extreme levels, like in every other field. I am never unhappy that I have come here.

Interviewer : Gopichand and Athreya worked as lyricists. Gopichand is pucca socialist while Athreya writes in a romantic manner. How did you feel working with both?

Prakash Rao : Let me tell you. Such extreme persons were there in every field. People should overcome their moods. Athreya never used to write a song unless he had a mood. When All India Radio people give you time and a programme, how can you say that you have no mood. Then we have taken control of moods also. Think M.S. Subbulakshmi garu has to give a concert, she can't say that she does not have mood at that time. Then we have made it clear that those in the film industry, artistes cannot escape duty saying they have no mood. We brought in systematized discipline into every department in the film industry. If people do not have any discipline, then they cannot stick to any field. If Rama Rao and Nageswara Rao had call sheet at 9, they used to begin work by that time. We used to give little relaxation in the timings because the studios were not so equipped those days. They were supposed to come clearing nature's calls. The females used to come a little bit late

in those days but these two heroes, used to be precautious, and used to maintain punctuality. The heroes used to arrive in the set punctually and others used to follow them. I worked with Rama Rao and Nageswara Rao. I think I worked more with Nageswara Rao than Rama Rao. In Tamil industry, I worked with Sivaji Ganesan. I had no chance to work MGR, though he asked me thrice. I knew that he used to give call sheet and failed to come on the sets at times, saying he had some meeting or other conference. I also did one Hindi movie with Rajesh Khanna. Those people used to come late. We used to reach the set by 9 am and they used to come by 11.30 am. We used to get exhausted by that time. If we wait for a bus and it comes late, we become frustrated and lose mood. It was Prem Nagar remake in Hindi. In Tamil, Sivaji Ganesan used to be ready with make up by 8.55 for 9 am call sheet. Then I told Rajesh Khanna to give call sheet by 11 am so that there will be no waiting and I too will be fresh. Time lost is lost forever. For you, the two-and-a-half hours lost is no problem but for the other small artistes, in that time, they can do one more film. I told him that instead of working with you, in one picture, I can work with somebody else for two pictures in this time. But, there was not much change in him.

Interviewer : You worked with LV Prasad, Narayana Rao, NTR and then with Rajesh Khanna. What is the difference in working with people of different times?

Prakash Rao : We should not discuss all those things. There are many changes through the years but they are inevitable. Are Hollywood movies these days having the same quality of yesteryears? Audience are also changing continuously, basing on their economic standards. Our film industry people say that television has had an impact on film industry but can we stop its onslaught. TV audience is different from film audience. For example, there is a rickshaw puller. He keeps on pulling his vehicle the whole day. He lives in a hut and he does earn something. If he sits in an AC theatre for two hours, he can give the same work output the next day too. Film is a sort of recreation. What else can be the rickshaw puller's recreation? When they are watching movies, it has become a necessity to make movies for them. Earlier, I used to buy a film roll for Rs 60 but now, it is costing Rs 3,000-Rs 4,000. Earlier, food could be bought for 2 annas but now, it is costing Rs 6. Similarly, the cost of everything has risen and ultimately, cost of production has gone up. When

crores of rupees are being invested, we can't take chances. This is not a play where there the loss will be less. In movies, a higher amount will be at stake. Each fighter takes Rs 500 a day while a dancer charges Rs 1,000-Rs 2,000 per song. All this put together, will become Rs 1 crore and in such a case, can we experiment? In such a situation, ask anybody to experiment. Just because one Viswanth's picture had been a success, can we ask everybody to shoot in the same manner? They cannot.

Interviewer : Tell us something about how the work by your colleagues helped in the growth of the film industry. First, you worked with Gudavalli Ramabrahmam, then with Prasad and then Gopichand, NTR. Tell us how each of them had contributed to the cinema growth. Just in brief.

Prakash Rao : I said earlier. Gudavalli Ramabrahmam is more a citizen. He never felt that he was from the film industry. He used to get up early in the morning and read 5-6 newspapers and then only think of films. With Tapi Dharma Rao Naidu, I used to discuss about literature and think of it critically. Naidu garu gained reputation more as a critic than as a writer and there used to be some influence of colleagues. In the modern times, technicians are becoming directors. Social or educational background is very less for these people. They do not have much of social activities. A man who joined as camera assistant and used to load the camera is becoming a cameraman first and a director later. They are disconnected from the outer world. I do not like this aspect in the present day movie persons. In our days, it used not be so. Gopichand is a very sharp person. I worked with him for some time and then we had to be away for nearly 7-8 years. After that, he asked me where I was all that time. When I told him all that happened, he remarked, "Is this just what happened?" If I recall my time spent with Gopichand, I feel very happy. Now, I have kept myself away from movies due to age factor and I do not want to interfere into the activities of the younger generation as there is difference in the working style to that of our days. And they are doing well. The extra activity I have is I am wedded to the game of bridge. I even go out to various places for bridge.

Interviewer : Prasad garu told that all you friends used to meet at a specific place. Prasad garu came to your camp after working under Gudavalli Ramabrahmam

garu. How did you feel about the sudden shift by Prasad garu?

Prakash Rao : With Prasad garu, I did Drohi and Gruha Pravesam. In Gruha Pravesam, Prasad garu and Gopichand took the lead in that movie and I was into production. I did not identify myself with the subject. Coming to Drohi, it was my subject and I was an actor in the movie.

Interviewer : As a director, what do you feel about L.V. Prasad garu?

Prakash Rao : He is a very hard worker. As a director, he has his own style. In one word, we can call him a 'dependable man' for a producer. He knows his work thoroughly and can stand on his feet.

Interviewer : Chakrapani garu and Prasad worked together from Sahukar. Chakrapani worked in many movies.

Prakash Rao : Prasad garu has the commitment and dedication to grow big in his life. He never felt that he was facing a lot of difficulties. He used to work with determination. Having been facing difficulties in his life, his thought process was always influenced by his past. Though he emerged successful independently, anxiety cast a shadow on his thoughts and he always used to prefer remakes. It is not that he has no originality of thoughts or ideas. It is just for safety he used to vouch for remakes. His past experiences taught him the principle of safety first. Be it for himself or for the producer, he did not go much for experiments. He always preferred safety. I did make mistakes sometimes. When I felt that people received a film which I made in a progressive note, I used to take the next movie with more vigour. Moreover, my friends used to write letters saying that the movie would have been more successful if it was 10 years later. I used to get influenced by these praises and words but Prasad always followed his principle of safety. AVN Reddy garu and Nagireddy garu also used to play safe but Vasu used to do adventures. Such a big production house like Gemini has gone into losses, Vasu could or could not be the reason behind it. But we should see the attitude. See, there are Saravana people running the AVM productions, they are very careful in every aspect.

Interviewer : Why did you choose Narayana Rao garu for Modati Ratri? Nagaiah

was also there at time.

Prakash Rao : He was the only handsome hero at that time.

Interviewer : NTR was also there by that time.

Prakash Rao : Yes, but he was locked up with the Vahini Productions. NTR and Nageswara Rao came after Narayana Rao.

Interviewer : What is your first film with NTR?

Prakash Rao : Stree Janma and then Vichitra Kutumbam. With Nageswara Rao, I took Kanna Talli.

Interviewer : What is the difference between NTR and ANR?

Prakash Rao : Nothing much. Both are very good artistes with discipline. See pictures where both of them acted together. Rama Rao was never behind Nageswara Rao. Rama Rao could be little negligent when he acted independently but Nageswara Rao was never careless. Both of them had a zeal to get good artistes. Nageswara Rao used to think that he should have a capable co-artiste along with him. Rama Rao never used to think of those minute things. He was busy with portraying his character. Both of them used to be guides for newcomers.

Interviewer : Sir, you have worked with Sivaji Ganesan.

Prakash Rao : I took many pictures with him. He is another good artiste. I did Harischandra and Prem Nagar and 2-3 more movies. I will tell you about a strange thing. I used to write the details of shots and go away. Earlier, I used to write for the whole movie. Later, I started writing for each set or scene. Twice I had a strange experience with Sivaji. He told me that he would act from a particular scene to another particular scene. Then you take my close shots. He knows his audience. He used to get involved in acting so much for emotional scenes that I even used to forget to tell 'cut'. This happened twice. In Prem Nagar, Vasant Nadia also acted. While shooting for this movie, Sivaji gave me an unnecessary expression and I told him later that I will cut it. He told me that he would do in which ever way I wanted it and did it too. After that he told me that if I could retain whatever he did, audience

would clap for his performance and he said it was up to me to decide. I retained the scenes and to my amazement, the audience clapped at the point Sivaji pointed out. That is why I said: “He knows his audience.” It is a pleasure to work with these veterans. I worked even with children and extracted the best from 300 children. These days, we are seeing ‘Mahabharatam’ and ‘Ramayanam’. We are seeing many new actors in them. Can you show me any particular actor saying that they are not acting well. They are acting very neatly. So, it means there is no dearth of actors in the world. These days, we are able to hear people saying why should we keep on falling behind the same actors. Are they no new actors? The only one thing here is because cinema is a business and we do it in the name of others, we are being forced to take actors as per the producer’s choice.

Interviewer : In those days, heroes had good reputation and films ran for days in the name of heroes but not the heroines. There used to be specific combination of heroes and heroines like NTR-Savitri. Why was it so?

Prakash Rao : When heroes played prominent roles, heroines became dumb dolls. Kanchanamala, Lakshmi Rajyam and Krishna Kumari worked in those days. These days, in Tamil industry, heroine-oriented films are being shot. For instance, take Lakshmi, ask a hero to come and dominate her in the role. Take Vanisri and Savitri. Even these people are good artistes.

Interviewer : Tell us about the lady artistes in your films. G. Varalakshmi, Savitri, Saroja Devi.

Prakash Rao : All of them were good artistes.

Interviewer : I am not saying they were bad. Tell us about the speciality of each artiste.

Prakash Rao : Let me narrate one incident. In Prem Nagar, I was supposed to take one shot on Vanisri and Nageswara Rao. Nageswara Rao said that he would work for two hours in another film and come. What should I do in these two hours? I took shots where Vanisri alone was there. In the meanwhile, Nageswara Rao came and I took the composite shots having both of them. I told her she can go after completion

of the shots but she did not go. She was still on the sets. In the meantime, I was taking counter shots on Nageswara Rao for those acted by Vanisri. She kept on watching the shots. When I told 'pack up', she came to me and asked me to retake her shots. I told her there was no problem with her shots but she said her reaction to what Nageswara Rao acted should be different. So, she requested me to retake the shots. This shows their commitment and involvement.

Interviewer : Tell us about Savitri.

Prakash Rao : I had no clashes with her. She was a good artiste. Even in Vanisri's case, there was no clash. Initially, I took the shots with Vanisri alone and when I took the opposite shots for the same, she felt she needed to act better, as she kept watching Nageswara Rao when he acted. It is not a question of clash.

Interviewer : In those days, there used to be no training. Now, there are film institutes. But at that time, for all the newcomers like Savitri and Vanisri, there was nothing. Did you mould any artiste? Can you say that because I did this to the actress or actor, they won recognition?

Prakash Rao : There is nothing like that. Let me tell you that screen is the only guru. I never worked as an assistant to any director.

Interviewer : I mean did you mould any actress? I think G. Varalakshmi rose to prominence just because of you.

Prakash Rao : She has her own ability. There is nobody who rose to prominence after I introduced them. When Suseela came to Madras for the first time, I took her in Balanandam after my brother recommended her. Then I took her audition and recorded one song. At that time, Pendyala Nageswara Rao garu was the music director. Then he asked me why we should experiment but I told we would take her. For the first time, she sang for my film. Later, one RCI engineer came to me and said that her voice was exemplary and asked me to get into a permanent contract with her. Then I told him it was a bad idea to keep such a nice artiste tied to me. If I ask her to come into a contract, then she will be of no use to herself or others. This same engineer then approached Shettiar. He used to take 4-5 movies a year. He

asked for a contract. I came to know about the information and asked Suseela to accept it. I thought he takes 4-5 films and she is a newcomer. In this deal, Shettiar keeps half for himself and gives only the remaining half to the contract artiste. Later, he even relaxed that condition and gave the entire amount to Suseela. He did such a thing fearing that he would be left with no artistes. He did not have any ulterior motives to exploit artistes. Later, Suseela used to show her gratitude towards me saying that I introduced her to the film industry. I felt it was accident and she stood by herself with her practice and efforts. I used to tell her I never did any great help to her and that it was not my nature to feel great of helping others. In fact, that it was her efforts which made her sustain in the field. I introduced Lakshmi. I am more than satisfied with her. She acted beyond my expectations. For instance, take Sivaji Ganesan. Before setting up my shot, I used to think that I should extract the maximum from the artistes. I know that he can do more than my expectation. Then during a particular shot, I told him to do whatever he wanted to do and that I would shoot later. If a character in the story gets angry, I can shoot it in two ways. We can take a close shot and their anger would get displayed properly. If I take it in some other angle, then I can use it for some other purpose. Now, if we have experienced actors and if we need to exploit them, we should not confine them or restrict them. I told you about giving the liberty to Sivaji Ganesan just now. After that, it took me three hours to take the shot. Then I needed a trolley which I got made from a carpenter. For that shot, the camera needs to be at a lower level. We made the cameraman lie on a blanket and pulled him with that to take the shot. A director is not a dictator. He should take the best from everybody on the set. At times, even cameramen suggest good shots to the director. While working on the sets and with veterans, the director needs to be flexible to change as per the need if there is a change in some things keep changing. Now a question arises, is it right always? There will be a rule for taking shots and we should ensure that it is not disturbed in the name of suggestions. Whether it is a novice or veteran actor, that rule should also be followed. At times, we should follow our instinct and at other times, we should try to follow other's suggestions. That was the principle I followed.

Interviewer : So you used to give some freedom to artistes? (The question as well as answer need to be heard more properly)

Prakash Rao : When the actor reads a scene for himself, he gets a picture in his mind. When I go into the set, I have some other picture in my mind about the same scene. Both of us meet only on the set of the movie. There used to be no rehearsals at that time. When shooting begins with whatever instructions I have written, I should be able to give some freedom to the artiste to suggest better ways to shoot the scenes. Whenever I give such a freedom, I forget my taking. But at the same time, I should keep in mind the visual impact of the scene. During such instances, I used to follow the give and take policy.

Interviewer : During those days, artistes used not to be so rigid.

Prakash Rao : At one time, I was working with a renowned artiste. I am an armchair director. I never used to do a lot of exercising. I sit in the chair and see the shots keenly. My assistants keep moving with the papers and explaining the shots to the artistes. That artiste was acting in a reaction shot. He gave such a reaction which was opposite to the situation. Then my assistant rushed to him and showed the paper to the artiste. The artiste asked for Take 2 and I shot it. He acted more better than what I expected. Later, he came to me and asked if I would keep writing everything regarding the shots and I said 'yes'.

Interviewer : Tell us about actress Lakshmi with whom you worked. What is your opinion about her? She is something different from other heroines.

Prakash Rao : The reason why she appeared different from others is of late, she began accepting such roles which had a different characterization and some speciality in the story. Earlier, she accepted all types of roles and then she did not appear different. If we give a normal character, then we cannot expect anything great from her. If artistes take care in choosing proper characters in films which have some prominent place in the story, then they can project themselves as different and special. Nowadays, we have glamour roles for heroines where they should be able to appear beautiful all the time. If the character has some special place in the film, they can prove their acting skills. We cannot know which artiste

has capability. In the latest heroines, there is Vijayasanthi. We can know that she has a lot of capacity through her acting in Pratighatana and Ramulamma. Yet, she can also match the requirement of glamour roles. We might get surprised seeing her range of acting skills. Similarly, many artistes would have a wide range of acting skills, many directors and cameramen would also have good skills. The industry should be able to exploit all these skills and the artistes should also get those opportunities to display their acumen. In such a scenario, Lakshmi became successful by accepting character roles even in Malayalam and Kannada movies, with remuneration ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 5,00,000 per film. When you begin choosing films carefully, you will be able to project your personality. Else, if any artiste or cameraman begins accepting all movies coming into their hands, they will lose their mark.

Interviewer : Heroine Radha was also there at that time. She acted as a glamour heroine for some time and then switched to character roles despite less remuneration.

Prakash Rao : Only some people can control their temptations. Glamour also is an aspect of films but the artiste has to think what special role will she be able to play in such a role and reject a film which means she has to reject Rs 5 lakh. Even money is a consideration in films. Rs 5 lakh is a big amount. Let me tell you one thing. I have a clear cut opinion about this. Kannada people say that we should leave Madras and settle in Bengaluru while the Tollywood people suggest that we settle in Hyderabad. Can they say the same to a doctor that he should not go to America but practice his profession in India only? People shift to places where they feel comfortable and think they can benefit from the relocation. When doctors, technicians and engineers are able to leave the country and go, will the cinema people shift to places they are invited? Wherever we take the movies, the country is getting its money. I will tell why the demand for moving to Hyderabad from Madras gained ground. When Hyderabad was declared as the capital of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad was not like any other town in Andhra. It was like a place in the middle east countries having prominence of Muslims. Then our chief minister thought that our culture should spread to that place and began urging the film

industry to shift to Hyderabad. Then they promised some sops to the film industry people but now, that is not the condition. However, I am not against the film industry people shifting to Hyderabad. Take the case of playback singer of Suseela. She sings three songs every day. She has been singing songs in 5 languages. How can you ask her to shift to Hyderabad? Take me. I directed films in all languages. A violinist does not have any language differences. So, I suggest that the government stop urging the artistes to shift their base but instead, build theatres in every town diverting all the subsidy money. Instead of giving heavy rents to the private parties, it will be better for the producer to release films in government-owned theatres. Then there will be a chance for releasing 'class' pictures. If good films should get released, producers have to withstand a lot of competition. If we can release such films in government-owned theatres, the government as well as the producer will stand to benefit. When you give me Rs 1 lakh and I take a class picture, which I can never release, what will be the real use? There is one film "Nimajjanam". There is no chance of raising one's head as the picture bagged President's award but was never released. If government builds theatres in every town and city, at least the film will be presented before the people. One day, such pictures might be honored by the people. The producer gives Rs 1 lakh to director and if it gets released, he will get Rs 2 lakh. Moreover, once the director gets Rs 2 lakh, that is not the end of the story as the government will also get its share of profit. Instead of just throwing the money, it will stand as investment and get back the government it's money. Moreover, it helps good movies also stand in competition with commercial movies. The government's initiative of giving subsidy to film people lacks vision and also commitment.

Interviewer : In your film career, has anybody inspired you?

Prakash Rao : I cannot tell you any such thing. Somehow, I came into the industry.

Interviewer : Your movie Modati Ratri is a big hit. There is a speciality in it. Prem Nagar is also a hit. Has anyone inspired you to take such films?

Prakash Rao : But one thing I can tell you. I liked the medium and through this, we are able to reach the public. If our movies make the public take a progressive step,

we are really very happy. Seeing the movies releasing these days, many people keep criticizing them. I am not going to criticize them because those in the film industry know their audience. Leaving aside minor things like songs and fights, we should be able to see if the film people are able to create awareness among the public about how the wealthy are exploiting the underprivileged or how the officials are misusing their power. Every movie has a subject and this should be educating the audience. When people add the adjective of 'like in a movie' to looting, it should be remembered that originally the looting happened for some other reason but in movie, looting is done for a different cause.

Interviewer : Actually, looting happened in those days.

Prakash Rao : Yes, it happened in America, England and now, it is going to happen in Russia too. All changes that should come in the society as per the economic conditions, will occur in every country and we should not try to stop them. When China encroached our land, they have taken hold of mountains on the borders which are of no use to anyone, but America encroached India, from blades to forks to culture. We have our own culture but has it not been encroached by the Western countries? China and Pakistan occupied our land but America encroached much more than what these two countries did. They have killed the personality of Indians. The influence of Americans can be felt in every aspect of life.

Interviewer : Have you any plans to get back to movies?

Prakash Rao : Earlier, I did some movies but suffered loss. Of late, I did one movie in Tamil Rosaappo Ravikkai. I took new artistes and technicians who knew nothing about studios. The same movie was taken in Kannada too. Both Tamil and Kannada films ran for 100 days. Moreover, the owners of the cinema theatres expressed fear that their furniture might be damaged by the audience, if they do not like the movie. However, one distributor released the film. Initially for a week, the movie did not go well but later, it caught pace. The original for this is Parasangada Gendethimma, a novel written by a language professor in Mysuru. In the preface to the novel, the novelist wrote, "This man is frequently coming into my mind. To remove him from my heart, I am transferring him to the paper." The crux

of the story is every change is the result of many sacrifices. Social evils like child marriages and widow marriages got changed after much sacrifice. Not just such evils, even minor changes need such sacrifice. You know about gloves. These gloves make way into a village and create a big sensation. Women wearing bra with the outlines being revealed to others also becomes a big issue. What the writer wants to say is that every change seeks sacrifice. Two people who took the movie, left the message embedded in the story and filmed the remaining things. Keeping the message in the movie in my mind, I took 'Kottha Neeru' in Telugu. Chandramohan acted in it. It did not get released for a long time. He acted very well but it was a flop. I suffered a big loss. Now, when the same movie was a hit in two other languages, why was the Telugu version a flop? In the Telugu film industry, there are eight big heroes and every week, two heavy budget films get released. In such an industry, who will watch this movie?

Interviewer : There should be a change in people's taste.

Prakash Rao : If there should be a change in people's taste, then the government should build theatres as I have said earlier. I took only Rs 1 lakh for Kottha Neeru while I spent Rs 7 lakh on it, the remaining Rs 6 lakh I lost. I don't want this Rs 1 lakh too. I want that movie to be released. I will accept my failure in front of the public than before the exploiters.

Interviewer : Can you say that something is your contribution to Indian cinema? As an actor, director. Can you say something is a speciality of Prakash?

Prakash Rao : I am not feeling sorry for being in this industry. I took one film 'Melukolupu'. People did not watch it. If there are 10 people in a family, all the 10 keep working in a poor family. In a middle-class family, if one person keeps earning, 10 people are ready to eat. The film had a message that such a set up should change. People in middle-class families should also do whatever work they can do. Even then I had a concern. Even though all the people in a poor family keep working and earning, they can never better their life because they keep wasting money on consuming alcohol. So, I thought if my film should tell the women and children of middle-class families also to work like that in poor families. The story

speaks of a retired officer. I tried to understand the feelings of the officer. When the officer was in service, he used to have peons and others greeting and obeying him but after retirement, he loses the respect, facilities and euphoria. He just sits at home. The role was played by CSR. He is a very good artiste. The peon role was played by Lanka Satyanarayana. His wife rolls beedis and helps the family get some income. His mother makes pakodas and sells it to others selling eatables on pushcarts, thus making her living. His daughter sells milk from the buffalo the family owns. That family has a good income. I can't tell the middle-class people to emulate the same because they are not educated and are not even spending time to get themselves educated. At the same time, only one person earns while the remaining five people keep whiling away their time in gossip, pushing their families into poverty. I think I took the film in 1954. When I look back at the movie, I wonder if I had done a wrong or if I had gone in an advanced manner. Later, I took one more picture that had a message saying that earning 10 friends would give more peace than saving Rs 10 lakh. In earning Rs 10 lakh, that man will have 10 enemies and you will lose your peace. If you earn 10 friends, you will live more happily, even this movie failed at the box office. Such movies are not commercial movies but good ones. Somehow, I managed the show. We used to be like a group. Pendyala Nageswara Rao and O.P. Nayyar used to be music directors in the group. There used to be some workers too and I could withstand in the industry for some time. Else, I would have been a failure and would have to keep finding my job roaming on the streets.

Interviewer : Yes, you would have to go for debts.

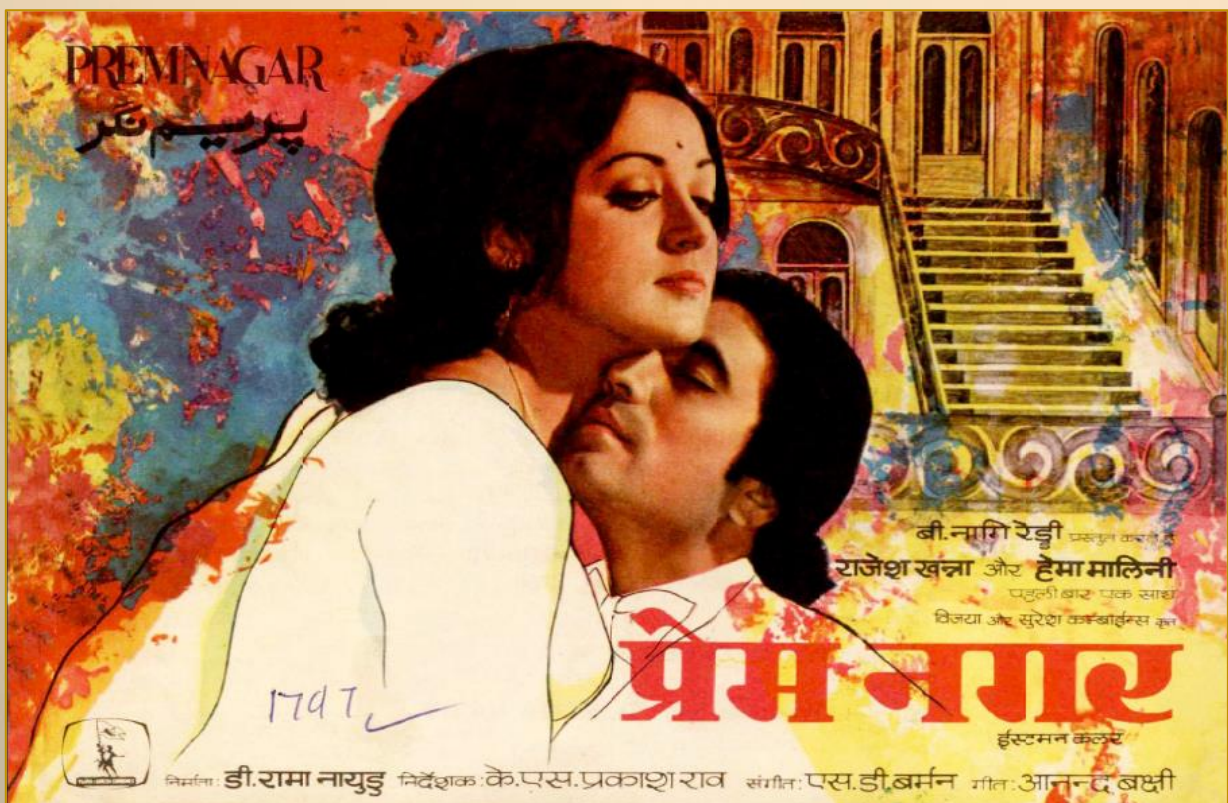
Prakash Rao : I came to the industry as a poor man. I did not have any assets and so, no one would give me loans. The ticket I bought to travel to Madras was not with my money. I am satisfied in one aspect and not satisfied in other aspect. On the whole, I told you about one thing. Those who came to the film industry would have led a much pathetic life, had they not entered the industry.

Interviewer : You have just heard Prakash Rao talking to K.M.B. Shah. Prakash Rao made his entry into the filmdom in 1940, associating with Bharati Productions and

was part of the Gudavalli Ramabrahmam's company. Later, he joined a variety of people and even got paired to G. Varalakshmi with whom he lived for quite some time. Prakash Rao's ability in directing and taking the whole team together in the course, was exhibited in the first directorial venture, a Telugu film Modati Ratri in 1950. Later, he blossomed into a full-fledged director not only in Telugu but made his mark in Tamil and Hindi also. A very successful film like Prem Nagar, made in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi, gave his jilted lover theme a boost as many Telugu filmmakers and Tamil as well as Kannada filmmakers try to follow him.

Today, Prem Nagar stands as an achievement for Prakash Rao. In his 70th year, he rests content in his Madras residence where his son K. Raghavendra Rao has risen as a full-fledged commercial filmmaker whose success in Telugu, Tamil and Hindi is both phenomenal. In fact, today, K. Raghavendra Rao continues to be the most sought after director in the Telugu film industry.

Some of his noted films are:

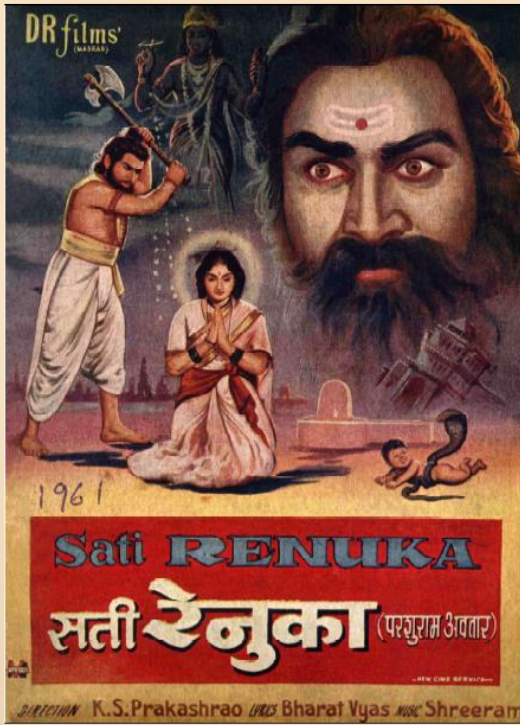


Movie - Prem Nagar

Year - 1974

Director - KS Prakash Rao

ntai



Movie - Sati Renuka

Year - 1961

Director - KS Prakash Rao



Movie - Petrathai

Year - 1953

Director - KS Prakash Rao

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