



# National Film Archive of India

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting  
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## Interview of one of the first female superstars of Telugu Cinema

### P. Bhanumathi by Randor Guy

Dr Bhanumathi Ramakrishna has been ..... in 1939, on behalf of the National Film Archive of India, for their Oral History Project. Shri Bhanumathi entered the Indian Film Industry as an actress in 1939. With Shri C. Pullaiah's Varavikrayam, the name became a phenomenal actress, talent, glamour and ... to find response ... but today, she continues to be very popular in Telugu and Tamil industry.

Her performance in Swarga Seema catapulted .... Meanwhile, while acting in Krishna Prema, she came in contact with Ramakrishna and they soon got married. As an actress, singer, writer, music director and director of films, Bhanumathi, the legend,.....

She became the first woman director in south when she brought out Chandi Rani. Continuing her career in 1980, in a span of over 50 years,..... Today Bhanumathi is ...  
Dr Bhanumathi Ramakrishna reminisces her .....

Over to Dr Bhanumathi

**Q:** Mam tell us about your entry in film industry?

**A:** My father used to bring records and put them at home as he was a great music lover. But I was not interested in music. I always wanted to write stories but not act or sing and exhibit the talents given to me by God. My father used to have a lot of enthusiasm to make me sing and act. When he was working as a revenue inspector, he used to apply

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for sick leave and act in .... Drama Company. Some people will have the craze. He is very fond of dramas. I do not have interest in them since my childhood days.

My father used to sing his songs in the drama. My mother taught him. Both of them used to sing. When I was young, I sang Tyagaraja kriti Endaro Mahanubhavalu sung by Balamurali without any mistake, just after hearing it once. My father was very proud that I was very talented in singing. He wanted to record my singing.

He never thought that that C. Pullaiah would book me in his film when I was just 13 years. Then I was offered roles in some dramas. Chalapathi Rao garu, Daitha Gopalam garu, Raghuramaiah garu were veterans in dramas. In those days, newcomers were not encouraged. There was no need to encourage new people.

In that aspect, Pullaiah garu took a lead and he brought Krishnaveni, he took a children's movie. Understanding that newcomers can bring success, he tried taking me for a role in Vara Vikrayam. Coming to the second role, I was actually very young, 14 years old then, while they needed someone older. The role was of a smart and bubbly girl. Meanwhile, my father got a call from Dr Govindaraju Subbarao garu, our family friend. Somebody informed Pullaiah garu that I, daughter of Venkata Subaiah though being very young, can sing good and that I would be the right choice for a role. Govindaraju Subba Rao garu told my father about the opportunity in films.

Soon, there was a ruckus in our house because acting in films was a taboo then. My mother feared that I would not get married if I went into films. My father wanted me to do concerts as I used to sing well.

Till that time, I was singing all types of songs. Lanka Satyam's brother, who used to work in HMV, came to our house, along with someone. They told my father that they would record my songs and asked my father to bring me to Chennai.

I, who was supposed to go to Chennai, had to go to Kolkata for the films. Pullaiah garu saw me in Rajahmundry and he wanted me to get into the film industry. I felt my life was doomed if I had to act in films. I thought people will laugh at me if I act in films. I was studying IVth Form (9<sup>th</sup> class) at that time and I felt my life would be that of a sacrificial goat, if I had to enter the filmdom.

I conveyed the same to my father. He said he too did not want me to act in films and assured me that there would be no problem to me as long as he was behind me. My

father is a daring man with a strong will power. When I went to Pullaiah garu, I sat with my back towards him and sang a song bowing my head because I did not want to get selected, but he said “This is our Kalindi” (the name of the leading character in the film) and I felt, it was very unfortunate. I thought the director would reject me saying I did not sing properly but I was chosen and soon, I started crying.

My father also was not interested in making me act but he was informed that there is no hero in the film. He began thinking what should be done as our family believed in traditions and films were a totally different area. In such a situation, my uncle came to our house and he tried to convince my father saying that nobody would touch me. Being a middle class family, my parents wanted to get me married off. But now, they started thinking whether to allow me to enter films, because I had siblings and if my entry into films would have an impact on them too. During those days, film industry was not considered as a prestigious opportunity for any one.

In my first film, there was no hero and that was a solace. I travelled to Kolkata to act in that film. All other artistes in the film were adults and I was the only child. However, they all treated me affectionately. Pullaiah garu used to call me ‘ammadu’. Pullaiah garu’s daughter was also of my age and we both used to be very friendly. My father insisted that I should be talking only with Pullaiah garu’s daughter.

While taking this Vara Vikrayam, simultaneously there were preparations for Panduranga Mahatmyam. To avoid my interaction with other artistes, they lodged me in a building where Viswanatha Satyanarayana garu, Balijepalli Viswanatham garu and Kaviraju Viswanatham garu, were given accommodation in nearby rooms. Kaviraju Viswanatham garu worked for Malati Madhavam.

Meanwhile, Vara Vikrayam picture became successful and there was talk that Bhanumathi and Balijepalli did a good job in the film.

Just as it is said that Ramayanam was not written by me, I too said that I did not act. But, the audience said that I acted very well. I did not know what I did in my first film because I did not have the necessity to act. My character was always remorseful because I did not like marriage. In real life too, I did not like marriage and had a feeling that I was a burden to my parents because I thought they have to get me married giving



huge dowries. They thought to get me educated and I also had an ambition to get educated, get a job and feed the entire family.

That was getting fulfilled now.

My next picture was Malati Madhavam. Even this film was shot in Calcutta. We stayed in Calcutta for one and a half years. Pullaiah garu asked my father that I should act in it. During my stay in Calcutta, my father got me tutored in Chandassu (telugu grammar) by Viswanatha Satyanarayana garu.

Balijepalli garu used to come to us every day to read the newspaper which we bought. We used to buy Amrita Bazar Patrika. He never used to like buying newspaper. Balijepalli used to come and ask my father if the newspaper was delivered. I remember this very much. Not just in movies, he used to be very economic in real life too.

**Q:** Your first two films were shot in Calcutta. Dharma Patni was shot in and then you shifted to Chennai. Can you tell us the difference in working conditions between these places?

**A:** Malati Madhavam was shot by East India Company. My father had an agreement that I should not be touched by the film's hero. Later, my father gained self-confidence that one can survive in the film industry if we are precautions.

Malati Madhavam did not do well at the box office because both me and the hero were newcomers and it also had some financial problems. The hero of the film was Pullaiah garu's nephew and the film did not take good shape.

After that film, my father had some illness. Even while at our home, he fainted twice and so the ECG equipment was put just outside our room. The film equipment like cameras used by them were outdated. There used to be not much equipment.

You went from south to Calcutta. Did they show any discrimination?

No, the artistes in Calcutta used to be very affectionate. I do not remember the name of the person who shot the film and the producer of the movie..... used to mingle well with us.

Tarachand used to be the manager then. Our Sunderlal was not to be found at that time.

Malati Madhavam was taken by B.A. Champa, not the East India Company.

At that time, working conditions used to be good. There used to be an office. They used to provide rooms to all the artistes and there used to be a mess from where food used to be supplied. And there used to be two vans in which all the artistes used to be transported.

It used to be fun in those days. People did not have reservations and egos and we used to be like a family. We used to be very happy.

**Q :** Tell us about Dharma Patni and at that time Nageswara Rao was also there.

**A :** Dharma Patni was taken by..... Nageswara Rao was not an actor of prominence at that time. He did not have any address. He cannot proclaim to have acted in that film. I think his role was a small one. It would have been good if he could have avoided considering this picture from the list of movies he acted. He came but nobody knew where he went. Many people tried to play the role I portrayed but none could fit in it.

The director of this movie asked my father that I should play the role. C. Pullaiah had good reputation but P. Pullaiah had a very bad name as he was linked with Santha Kumari. My father refused to allow me act in that movie because I should get married. He told P. Pullaiah and till recently to my husband too that C. Pullaiah used to act and show me. Will you do that, he asked P. Pullaiah. He used to ask the same to my husband too and then my husband used to say that my father causes headache by making such remarks.

P. Pullaiah garu wrote to ..... that Venkata Subbaiah refused to allow his daughter act in the movie and his distributors in Nellore came rushing to Chennai. They tried to pacify my father, giving a guarantee that the hero would not touch me in the movie and finally, he agreed. There used to be one Rallabandi Kutumba Rao also.

I met Chakrapani garu for the first time on the sets of Dharma Patni. He came for writing the script and our first introduction was not in a favourable atmosphere. Apart from one incident in a train, there was one other thing. Seeing the script in which the sentences ended with 'cheppamaaku' and 'cheyyamaaku' (means don't say and don't do), my father asked who wrote it and Chakrapani said that he did it. My father

then told him not to write in Tenali dialect but correct it into 'cheppaku' and 'cheyyaku'. I and my father used to be harsh.

**Q:** Did you meet Santha Kumari too on the sets of Dharma Patni?

**A:** No, she was pregnant with her second daughter then. Her first daughter was 3-year-old then, during 1940. I used to be very adamant, egoistic and never care for others. I used to be in the company of my father all the time. I never was connected to the industry, then or even now. Neither was I interested in knowing who was acting along with me. Going to the shooting was more like going to the school. I used to be waiting eagerly for cancellation of shooting. I and my friends used to be.... and Pullaiah garu used to request me to come for the shooting.

My father used to be smoking. Both me and my father were known to be very egoistic. We stayed for four months there. If we leave the sets, the staff used to feel relieved and when we came on to the sets, they used to be very obedient. My father used to be smoking on the sets and depending on my mood, I used to agree for the shoot. The director and producer used to complain that shooting was getting delayed due to my moods.

**Q:** There is talk that Krishna Prema (title of a movie) turned into Ramakrishna Prema. (Ramakrishna is the spouse of Bhanumathi). Tell us something about it.

**A:** It is a very delicate matter. I feel it happened due to divine intervention. Just as they say marriages are made in heaven, it happened so. People used to keep praising Ramakrishna that he is a very good man and this talk had an impact on me. If there were women at one place, he used to move the other way round to avoid seeing them. He never used to face women. Just as Dharma Raju was afraid of a war, he (my husband) feared women. Everybody used to say that Ramakrishna was a gem of a boy. In addition, since my childhood I had an opinion that a wealthy man is a bad person. If I have to marry, he should be a man without wealth. I used to have some beliefs that a wealthy man would be very egoistic. In some corner of my heart, I had a feeling that I should marry a poor man who is good at heart. My mother also tried to influence me



in changing my opinion but I stuck to my belief. I could not help it. For nearly a year, he did not know that I was loving him.

I made my younger sister tell about my love story to my father when they were seeing suitable boys for me in 1970s. My father was trying settle my marriage with actress Kanchana's nephew, who was my father friend's son, living in Kodavali. He was smart and had all vices as they were zamindars. Their family name was Peesapati. My father and his friend were very close since their childhood. My father wanted me to get married to a smart guy. That was his dream.

Sensing that my father was readying to get me married, I became anxious and alerted my sister. My sister used to accompany me for shooting sometimes and then she came to know that I wanted to marry Ramakrishna. So, she asked me if I wanted her to communicate the issue to my father and I agreed, saying that I cannot approach my father regarding my marriage. I was really scared of facing my father, in connection with my marriage, because Ramakrishna was far away from what my father wanted to see in my husband.

My sister told the matter to my father and he was disheartened to know that Ramakrishna did not match with his choices. He was unhappy as he felt that my choice was not good. First of all, he was not a Brahmin (the caste to which Bhanumathi belonged) but I did not know that. On seeing someone physically, I could not know if they were Brahmins or not. If somebody was fair and lean, I used to think they were Brahmins. Ramakrishna used to be wheatish but I could not know his caste. On inquiry, we found that he belonged to the sect Golconda Vyaparulu. I never knew that there was such a sect in Brahmins. I only knew of Vaidikulu and Niyogulu but learnt that even Golconda Vyaparulu were also Brahmins and I heaved a sigh of relief.

My father was not happy with the lean physique of Ramakrishna. He was also not happy that Ramakrishna studied only BA and was working in the film industry. I and my father discussed about Ramakrishna but he never knew about it. Kannamba and other technical staffer on the sets, who used to be close to me, tried to convince my father but he was not convinced.

At that time, Japan hurled a bomb on India and Krishna Prema shooting was stalled. There was blackout in Madras and at that time, they used to place a small bulb in the

studio room and get the make-up done. Somehow, we managed to complete the shooting of Krishna Prema. Then Ramakrishna went to Bombay.

**Q:** Did he work as the assistant director?

**A:** Yes, he worked. He worked as assistant director with HV Babu for that film. I wrote about all this in my autobiography “Naalo Nenu” in detail. Somehow, my father got convinced about my marriage but his brothers and our relatives were worried how would Ramakrishna manage to live with just Rs 150 per month (his salary). At one time, my father called for Ramakrishna and then, he said that he did not know that I wanted to marry him and that he would not marry me. My father was really shocked. Then he told Ramakrishna that I was liking him and asked if it was okay to marry me. Ramakrishna told my father he had no objection to marry me but said it would be hard for me to adjust with him because he was very poor. My father told him that he could allow me to act or give concerts, though not for money completely, so that I could grow as an artiste or singer in life. My father did not like a budding artiste to be lost in oblivion. But Ramakrishna did not agree for this. He told that after marriage he would like his wife to be with him and behave as he wanted. I felt very happy because I always did not like acting and thought the marriage would relieve me of the cinema industry. I was happy but my father was not because Ramakrishna insisted that I should quit acting after marriage. Meanwhile, one of Ramakrishna’s relatives came to Madras and as they say, ‘Kagala karyam gandharvulu teerustaru’ (if something is destined to happen, somebody would intervene to get it done), she wanted to see the girl he would marry. She called us on phone and my sister picked the call. My sister told she would send me and secretly, without the knowledge of my father, she sent me to Ramakrishna’s place. We used to have a rickshaw. I got into it, telling that I was going to meet a friend. It was the first time that I told a lie. I did know that the secret meeting would end up in marrying Ramakrishna. At the same time, I enjoyed the taste of a love affair. I went to Mambalam (a place in Madras) wearing a silk (pattu) saree. I did not wear any special jewellery too. She saw me and I learnt that she was about to leave for Bandar the same evening. Even her ticket was booked. She took a outhouse for her daughter in Madras and took me there. She inquired me about my family and at that



time, there was one S.P. Rao, one Satti Babu, and Sekhar Chandra, Balasaraswathi's brother, were present there. All of them were her friends in Bandar it seems. All of them were pulling Ramakrishna's legs asking him what sort of a hero was he who is silent when a girl is ready to marry him. Ramakrishna was telling them that he was afraid of my father. The Ramakrishna's relative, the woman who called me, said that my father will not agree for our marriage and that she feared if we would die as Laila-Majnu. She just asked Ramu (Ramakrishna) if she can do their marriage. Immediately, Ramakrishna objected to it and said that my father would become panic if we get wedded, so suddenly without any intimation. He told her to send me back home because he had never called me out and that it would bring disrepute to me and our family. All those present there did not agree with this idea. They told him that my father would not readily agree to our marriage, invite him and do the ritual. They asked him how long would he be like a bachelor. For one and a half year by then, I was in love with him. Ramakrishna's relative pacified and consoled me as I was fearing that my father would take some action if I got married so suddenly without his knowledge. I did not agree to our marriage without my father's presence and even he did not want it to happen. If I was to get married in such a way, I would have done it long back. But Ramakrishna's relative insisted that we should get married and said that she was like my mother and I do not know why she started showing so much interest in our marriage. She was very affectionate towards Ramakrishna and considered him like her son. She got her ticket cancelled and everything happened fast. She said she would put both of us in the house she had taken on rent for her daughter, Rama, and take her to a hostel. Now, when I look back I feel there was some divine force which made us act in such a manner. Else, we would not have got married then. At that time, I was doing Gowri Puja for 15 days, seeking divine intervention for my marriage. In the past, showed my jataka to some astrologer and asked them what sort of husband would I get in my life. On the jataka paper, it was written that I would get a good husband if I performed Gowri puja for 40 days (one mandali), as all obstacles in the way of marriage could be overcome. Maybe, Lord Shiva and Parvathi sent the woman to us to perform our marriage. Immediately, she got a 'muhurtam' fixed and Ramanujam Naidu, principal of..... and Ramamurthy and Santharam and the

whole lot of people from Andhra Maha Sabha, all of them came for our marriage in the temple.

**Q:** So, by the time of your marriage, you were not an established star?

**A:** No. I did Krishna Prema and then, ..... After marriage, my first film was Swarga Seema.

**Q:** How did you feel about B.N. Reddy's direction? Till then you did many mythological films.

**A:** Many people, both north and south Indians, say that my first film is Swarga Seema, because I was born as an actress in Swarga Seema. In all the previous films, I just used to do all that I was asked to do by the director and my father. I did not much of acting in those films. It was in Swarga Seema, I started thinking. Even for this film, there was lot of fuss. For 6 months after marriage, I did not act but B.N. Reddy garu insisted that I should act and kept persuading me just as that woman insisted that I should get married. Linga Murthy and Samudrala Raghavachari garu also kept persuading me and my husband that I should be allowed to act in just that one movie.

**Q:** So after marriage you quit films?

**A:** Yes. Because both of us planned for it. He did not want me to act and I too did not want it. In such a condition, they kept telling my husband that he should not spoil my career and B.N. Reddy garu is a reputed director and the production house is also a very good one. Moreover, they told us that the film industry was like a family. They told my husband that he should agree to my acting in that particular film. I did not want to act but felt that I will act only if my husband tells me to. Somehow, both of us yielded to the pressure. We thought I will do only that picture. B.N. Reddy garu made a personal request to my husband that he should allow me to act at least in that one film. Being a very shy persons, my husband agreed to it. Meanwhile, my father was very happy that somehow my husband agreed for my acting, . Later, my parents left for my native place to look after our farms there. While this picture was being shot, once Y.V.

Rao garu ( tahsildar movie) came to the set. He is a close friend of my father. ....Seeing me act in that film, he lined up nearly 4 pictures for me. ....

In Tahsildar you acted with Y.V. Rao?

No. Ch. Narayana. My character was Kamala in it.....I still remember that even without seeing the movie, I sang one song “Maa varu Taasildaaru” and it became popular. Bhatt: Yes, it is there in the.....

Oh. Is it there in that. I did not hear to that. They gave me the records of Krishna Prema and .... but not that movie. Both of them were big hits. Swarga Seemawas a turning point in my career. It received an overwhelming response in Tamil Nadu. In Swarga Seema, I really put in efforts to act. Till then, I acted as a village girl and that roles I did naturally. In Swarga Seema, I acted as a vamp in it. I did not like to do the role but did it and B.N. Reddy garu also shot the movie carefully. Till then, I used to interfere into the music part of the movie very minimally. Recently, there was a discussion on ‘Oho ho Pavurama’. P.B. Sriram was telling that Rajanikanta Rao garu claimed that he composed the tune for Oho ho Pavurama song. No, it was not composed by him. The tune composed by Rajanikanta Rao was different. I made Sriram hear to Rajanikanta Rao’s tune. The tune for that song which got recorded in the movie was composed by me and Nagayya garu. Since then, I took interest in music direction really. I did not show interest on music direction for the entire movie but at least for my songs. I never allowed my songs to be recorded without my presence. I not only observed Rita Hayworth’s acting in Blood and Sand but composed a tune from audio that has hummed in that movie. I sung that in the presence of Nagayya garu and it was taken in the movie. Na bhooto na bhavishyati (Never before, ever after) Let me tell you, there is no such beautiful tone like ‘Oho ho pavurama’ even today. The song was a highlight in the movie.

**Q:** Did Ramakrishna garu continue direction?

**A:** Yes. For Tyagayya movie, he worked along with Nagayya garu. They asked me to do some dance but when my husband did not accept, I refused to do it. Some people keep writing false things. Rushyendramani portrayed some character in it. Because I acted



in Swarga Seema, they asked me to do that role too but I refused to do it. Even my husband did not want me to do. Nagayya garu also did not pressurise.

**Q :** There is talk that you stopped acting abruptly in 3 movies. In C. Pullaiah's Dakshayagnam, they say that you stopped acting after shooting for 3 reels.

**A :** I did not act in Dakshayagnam.

**Q :** Similarly, you stopped acting in Chenchu Lakshmi and .....

**A :** Yes, I came out of Chenchu Lakshmi. I acted with C.S. Rao.

**Q :** How was Ramakrishna garu's direction? How was your direction?

**A :** When my husband used to work as a director, he used to say that he did not like the atmosphere. He did not like working there. He felt he was not being given prominence. Being an actor, Nagayya garu used to focus more on acting. My husband had clashes with his co-directors. He used to complain that he cannot take it any more.

Then I told him why can't he start his own direction. But my husband had doubts about how to start a company. At that time, I was pregnant. He thought for some time.

.....Later, he told B.L. Narayana, who worked as the production manager with him, that he wanted to start his own company. He asked Narayana if he would join him and Narayana accepted it without any hesitation, predicting that it would be a success.

**Q :** So you took Ratnamala first under your banner.

**A :** Then he started off with Ratnamala. In fact, we wanted to take Ratnavali (Sanskrit drama) in which the heroine is Vasavadatta. Somebody told us that it is a very unlucky picture. By that time, he worked on Vasavadatta character too but he did not like it. Then I told him about the story of Ratnamala. That story was actually told to me by my mother but not my own story. It was a folklore. I asked to take that picture. In those days, folklores used to sell very good. At that time, Balaraju was also there. Balaraju and Ratnamala were shot simultaneously. On hearing to the story, Samudrala also agreed that it was very nice and the interesting element was a 16-year-old girl would

be married to 16-day-old boy. I too feel that the story is interesting, both in those days and even today.

I gave my gold as guarantee to the distributors and the picture ran for 100 days.

**Q:** In that movie, there was one Suryanarayana...

**A:** Yes... he did a very small role, he appears in a dream sequence and then at the end of the movie. There is no hero in the movie. The hero is a 16-day-old baby in the movie.

**Q:** So that is the first movie in Bharani pictures?

**A:** Yes, this is the first movie under the banner.

**Q:** How did your banner get the name?

**A :** Our son Bharani was born by that time. Our son was born during Bharani nakshatram (star). We bought a car, though a second hand one, after he was born. We also started looking for buying a house. There was some improvement in our life after he was born. Small streams get strengthened when another canals join it. Similarly, some people become strong after marriage while some others will be able to witness fortune with the birth of their children. His actual name was Venkata Subrahmanya Rao.

**Q:** That is your father's name.

**A :** Yes, it also includes my father's-in-law name. People started saying that babies born during Bharani star are very lucky. People working with my husband also suggested that we should name our banner in the name of Bharani and we did it.

**Q:** Did not B.N. Reddy and people like him feel envious about you when you floated your own production house?

**A:** No, never. B. N. Reddy has only one defect. He always insisted that artistes should never get married but dedicate their entire life to art. He used to have a set of beliefs and also say that he had seen people conforming to his principles. However, me and

my husband, as we did not belong to that category of artistes, used to feel irritated with his points of view.

Except for that, he has a very good taste. Hats off to his taste.

**Q:** I think at this time you did “Mangala” “Nishan”. How could you go to Gemini while working with B. N. Reddy in a dedicated manner.

**A :** At that time, I had several offers like Rajamudri and so, I had to choose the characters which would get me some name. For the first time, I started accepting roles only if I liked the character among those available. Else, I would not accept the role.

**Q:** What was your first film under Gemini banner?

**A:** Vasana saw my acting in Raja Mukthi. Both N.S. Krishnan and Tyagaraja Bhagavathar booked me after coming out of jail. They booked other artistes as heroines and me in the second character. I felt I was saved.

**Q:** What was the movie taken by NSK?

**A:** Nallathambi. It was written by Annadurai.

**Q:** There is one Pulandara..

**A:** We started Punlandara. ....

**Q:** Did you shoot it?

**A :** No, my husband shot some part and then stopped it as he found that it was not progressing properly. We booked ..... and gave some advance but had to abandon the project. Then we took Laila Majnu. We heard that someone else was also shooting Laila Majnu and so expedited our movie. This movie was also not a success.

**Q:** Did you shoot the film in two languages?

**A:** No, we shot only in Telugu and got it dubbed in Tamil.

**Q:** Was Kaadhal too taken in the same manner?



**A :** No, we took Prema picture simultaneously in Telugu. Before going for Kaadhal, in 1947, I acted in Raja Mukthi and Nallathambi. In Nallathambi, I acted..... It was for the first time that I was paired with MGR. This was shot in Pune Prabhat Studio. For BM Johny, MGR's wife was paired by Tyagaraja Bhagavathar....., I and MGR were the second pair and MGR's brother M.G. Chakrapani essayed the role of my brother.

In that movie, there is one popular song. Vasan saw my dance in that song and thought that I would suit for Mangala character. Then he approached me.

For two years, we stayed there during which we got a house constructed there. In 1949 June, we did Gruha Pravesam.

**Q :** The Gemini people took you in 4-5 pictures.

**A :** They took three versions of Nishan and two version of Mangala—Telugu and Hindi. Nishan, Apoorva Sahodarulu in Telugu and Apoorva Sagodharargal in Tamil. It was filmed based on English novel Corsican Brothers, written by Alexander Dumas.

They shot Mangamma Sapatham song in Mangala. However, A.R. .... came and said that I should first act in Apoorva Sagodharargal because he had kept the script ready for it long back and he insisted that I should act in it. He told me that he was filming it in Tamil and Telugu first.

Actually, they booked me for Mangala but suddenly switched over to Apoorva Sagodharargal. That film went for a silver jubilee celebration and I am happy that I had acted at least in a small role in that movie. The song "Laddu Laddu" became very popular.

Then they shot Mangala. While acting for Nishan, I got several movie offers in the Hindi film industry.... At this time, ..... and .....

Then the Jupiter pictures people took Rani in two languages.

**Q :** Was it taken by L.V. Prasad?

**A :** No, it was taken by A.S.S. Sami .... and in the end, L.V. Prasad came into the scene. With two people handling the direction, it was a flop. This film was based on The loves of Carmen starring Rita Hayworth.

Initially, Jupiter Pictures booked me for Marmayogi starring Anjali Devi. My character is a very dirty one. She brings her lover and introduces him as brother. I told the Jupiter executives that I do not want to act in the movie as the fundamental concept of the movie itself was not appealing to me and was about to give their advance back. They said that they cannot take back the money because it would bring disrepute to them. They said that I should act for them, at least in a different movie and I agreed to be in Mangala.

By that time, I achieved maturity in acting and also in selecting my characters and roles.

As a matter of fact, at that time, I had some irritation over doing so many films. I wanted to live as a simple homemaker of a middle-class family but was again being pushed into the muddle of movies and this was causing some irritation in me. That irritation I used to show on others. As you are asking me now about my life, I had irritation then and now, it had increased all the more.

Had I had some interest in earning money, I would not have had the irritation. If I had a dream to become a prominent person or have numerous cars and big bungalows, may be, I would not have felt that irritated. In my case, I did not want all that but it was being thrust upon me. What I did not want was coming to me without much effort and this is really something interesting.

People used to tell me that I was acting very good even though I did not like the film industry. Then I used to say I cannot neglect or spoil any role, if I agree to act in a movie. People praised my acting even when I did not give much importance to any role or character. People used to say I had a lot of ease in acting. In some people's case, it happens like that and it happened with me.

**Q:** B.N. Reddi garu ...malleeswari vande mataram...

**A:** Let me go back. During Swarga Seema, B.N. Reddy was quite nervous as Ramnath and Sekhar left the project and his condition was like a fish thrown out of water. When the duo were involved in co-direction, he used to smoke his cigarette and say Ramnath OK and Sekhar OK. When both of them left him, he was dependent on some other person. After them, he was depending on K. Kaleswara rao garu, assistant director. He

used to frequently ask the cameraman and assistant director if the shot was okay and exhibit his tension with the artistes. I used to wonder why he was becoming so tensed. I believe BN is not good with the technical part of film shooting, he used to depend on the cameraman.

During Malleeswari time, Sekhar came back and he took many shots of me and arranged them in blocks. Later, he called BN Reddy for his approval. That was how we strived for that movie to suit to the taste of BN Reddy. We worked a lot for Malleeswari. Every day, hundreds of shots used to be taken. We used to slog on the sets as he never used to allow us to leave the sets. We used to spend a lot of time speaking to each other or doing some work on the premises.

Whenever somebody said that they needed to go to Vahini or some other studio, BN used to say, "Yes, you give them call sheet because they are wealthy." At times, BN used to scold a lot and my husband did not like it. We worked and put in all our efforts irrespective of his screaming because we wanted the film to be a success.

My husband used to fear BN a lot because he complained about my curls. For Rani picture, I put the curls and for others shot in Gemini Studio, I removed. I used to frequently experiment with my curls and he did not like it. He used to complain that for his movie, I did not keep my hair in proper condition.

He used to be behaving more like a child. Good at heart. My husband used to ask why had I put on curls when BN was complaining about them. Good at heart.

If I have to speak about Malleeswari, you would not have appreciated it if you had seen the first version of the film. It is the second version that the public saw. The first Malleeswari was 19,000 feet or 21,000 feet. I do not remember properly. It was released in Ashok theatre and people yawned and slept. You would suffer from headache and gulp a saridon.

He took the young Malleswari and Nagaraju characters for 6,000-ft. During his childhood, it seems that he felt the hero and heroine did not have much role in the movie and the major portion of the story was during their childhood. So, he took that roles for 6,000 ft.

My husband saw the film and said that had he a pair of scissors in hand, he would have cut it a lot. My husband is a editor-director. He used to take the shots very precisely.



They used to be like edited shots. Somehow, I cannot appreciate a director who does not have knowledge of editing because they do not know how to shoot a film. They just shoot reels and reels and the editor will have a lot of job. It will be like singing a song in tune with 'taal'. A song sung out of 'taal' will sound pathetic. Such would be the outcome if the director is not an editor.

At the same time, casting and editing should be together. Else, there would be no time sense. Then only would they understand for how much time each shot be taken. They will know for how much time dialogues should be delivered or for how much time should the artiste be in a certain posture.

During Swarga Seema too, he used to ask Jayamma to walk slowly during the shoot. He used to take the shots like a stickler. That film shot for 11,000-ft appears to be a 20,000-ft one. Even Malleeswari, he took for 20,000 ft. Later, every one told him to cut it down. It was very lengthy initially. When the first version was released, it was not successful. It was cut before releasing it in Madras. Over 5,000 ft of the movie was cut down. The childhood portion of the movie was edited to 3,000 ft. In some other portions too, the film was cut and brought to 15,000 ft. When such huge portions of the movie were cut, he felt disappointed but it was only then that the movie was a success.

The movie ran successfully in Madras. The second version of the movie was a hit.

**Q :** Then you started acting with ANR and other heroes. Can you tell us your experiences with them.

**A :** ANR means Nageswara Rao. We introduced him in Ratnamala. We gave a very small role to him. In Laila Majnu, people did not know how much would he be successful. They used to say, "What is this Ramakrishna? You should have chosen a hero with good physique beside Bhanumathi." Even my husband did not like him but he used keep on doing rounds to our office and so, we gave him a chance as it would help him prosper. ANR should be grateful for his life to Ramakrishna Rao garu (my husband). Rao garu designed ANR's character and took the shots very carefully which elevated him as a hero. I also do not like him. Whatever publicity I gave about the film was for director Ramakrishna Rao garu. I and BN used to be on the same page regarding art.

**Q:** In Batasari, may be it would be have been good if Rama Rao was there.

**A:** Yes, it would have been good. In the original, it was Uttam Kumar who did it. My husband actually got the print and put it in Bharani Studios permanently. It used to be played shot by shot and ANR used to see it and then act. Because it was our own studio, there was such a facility. The credit for ANR's good acting skills should go Uttam Kumar. The public will not know what is there behind the scenes. They would say ANR acted very nice but he imitated Uttam Kumar. I cannot imitate any one. Even ANR knows that I cannot imitate anybody. I know what ANR did in Batasari. ANR is always called a folklore hero. Ask them about their experiences of acting with us and what they learnt from us. You ask them.

For acting in Vipranarayana, BN helped a lot. When others recommended that we should not have ANR in that movie, BN batted for him. (Inaudible)... At times, while acting in that movie, I used to limp for ANR because I used to appear taller than him. The other hero (Relangi) used to be a little bit stout and short. ANR used to have some problem with his leg. Somehow, the picture came out well. The credit for this should go to Ramakrishna Rao garu. He is not such a person who used to exhibit his greatness like BN or others. He is reticent. It is not that BN boasted about his greatness. He used to speak about his taste and impress others but Ramakrishna Rao garu is not such a person.

Ramakrishna Rao garu knows about his strengths and limitations. He used to be very calm. I used to ask him why he was like that. My only concern was that my husband should gain more reputation than me. The Film Chambers people offered him the president post several times. Whenever he contested for the president post of Film Chambers, no body used to contest. He was like a *ajaata satruvu*.

My husband used to refuse to contest for the president saying he never wanted to achieve big things in life. He used to tell them only to contest and become big in life and distance himself from the process. He never used to brag. He never used to accompany me.

**Q:** You directed Chandi Rani.

**A:** Yes, after Bharani Studios was started.

**Q:** Was Bharani Studios launched to fulfil your passion for direction?

**A:** I never liked the studio to be launched. I wanted to buy theatres whenever we had some profit by doing films. When we discussed about what to do with the surplus money, I wanted to invest the money in buying theatres, apart from investing in making films. There was one theatre (name inaudible 56:03) which they wanted to sell for Rs 9 lakh and we bargained for Rs 7 lakh. We went to watch a movie Oak theatre and eat ice cream there. It was priced at Rs 3 lakh in those days. It was in a dilapidated condition. It was not big at least. I told I would buy that theatre. Actually, what happened was when we started Love movie, four of the technical staff left us and formed into a group (Dushta Chatushtayam). My husband was innocent but I knew how people were. I know that BL had been corrupt and swindled a lot of money. He used to work as the production manager and with a lot of trust, my husband used to give him blank cheques with his signature. Initially, my husband thought of giving partnership to this man and to Samudrala after four months and also to C.R. Subbaraman, music director, in our company which we planned to get started by our son. But we abandoned the project and they felt disappointed and swindled that money in Bharani Studios. Among them, this BL embezzled more money. After having swindled the money and leaving us, they planned a movie, Deva Dasu, and asked me act in it. I refused the offer because they betrayed us. Then they approached my husband and he too turned down the offer. Later, Savitri acted in it. My husband thought of starting the studio and said that he would construct one floor, buy one camera. While taking Love (Kaadhal) picture, it was taken under the supervision of Nagireddy garu. He used to be very busy. There were so many producers for that movie. We needed a zamindar set for that movie but only a small room was left for it. Then my husband became very angry and thought that he should have a own spacious floor in the studio but I was against it. (Inaudible...58:10) I knew that my husband could not do business. I too did not have interest in it. We were artistic and creative workers but not good at business. I knew this pretty well. I did not want this headache.



But my husband insisted that he will start with one floor. He also started constructing the theatre. We wanted to plan a picture but could not till the construction was over. Meanwhile, one astrologer, Veeresalingam garu, came to our house. He is SAV Sastry's brother-in-law. He is our relative. Occasionally, he used to see jatakams. At one time, he saw my jatakam and told me that I would become a director. I am telling this just to make you know how things took shape. He told even my husband that his wife would become a director. Then my husband said that he also does not want to take pictures at that moment and that I only should do it then. Immediately, Veeresalingam garu said that I should start a picture. I too was interested in direction and was also brave enough to take up the job. I saw many directors and worked with them closely. Moreover, seeing my husband taking the picture, I knew the nuances of it. I loved his direction and he being an editor-director, I could understand skills in taking shots. I had interest in folklores only as socialist outlook was not prevalent at that time. (Inaudible....1:00:00) It would have been good if Dheeraj Kumar and Dev Anand acted..... My husband said there would be a problem with Hindi heroes as they would stay in hotels and he would be busy with some other work. We had less manpower to take care of all the things. Managing Rama Rao, Ranga Rao would be easy. Telugu and Tamil pictures were okay. We can get it dubbed in Tamil. But that picture went for 10 weeks. Pictures which used to go for only two weeks used to have 100 days functions and we were not used to it. We used to be like removing pictures which could go for 100 days too before the deadline. That is the problem with my husband. The Vivaha Bandham picture ran for 14 weeks. Vipranarayana ran for 18 weeks. Mukkapati Kutumba Rao used to organise 100 day functions for even those which ran for just 3-4 weeks and flop pictures like Chaduvukunna Ammayilu which ran for just 3 weeks. That used to be the 100 days craze. My husband did not have that craze. He used to say who would organise such functions spending money, in addition to the loss created by the movie. My husband never used to like all this hype.

**Q:** Tell us about the Hindi version of Mangala. (Inaudible)

**A:** It ran well in Calcutta. We released it in Bombay after two weeks. It ran well in Rajasthan and UP too.

**Q:** Heroes from Telugu industry.....Inaudible

**A:** North Indian do not accept Telugu heroes. Both the heroes were from Telugu land. The heroine was Bhanumathi. I was popular by that time but the biggest drawback was Bhanumathi cannot dance. There were Mangala dances in the picture and I did not dance which was a big disappointment to the audience. They said, 'Woh Bhanumathi dance nahi kiya is picture mein.' I did not dance in that picture and it was the biggest mistake. The Hindi audience would have at least felt happy seeing my dance. The picture was neither a big success nor a failure.

There was a mixed response from the audience. Being a vast area, it had different response in different places.

**Q:** Inaudible....

**A:** I think we dubbed it. One is Sudarshan.

**Q:** What were the problems you faced as the first woman director?

**A:** From the beginning, I have been very fortunate. People used to get scared of me and later, they started respecting me automatically. They might speak anything behind me but before me they used to be very obedient.

**Q:** When they feared you, how could they work for you properly. Did you face any problems due to such feelings?

**A:** No, it is not fearing seeing me. It means they used to be respecting me by being in their limits. *Bhayam kadu Bhaya bhaktulu... Gaurava Prapatthulu.*

This man (NTR) tried to be over smart in the end but I fixed him. At times, I used dupe instead of him but at the end, he came and acted. People could not find the difference between the real hero and dupe.

**Q:** Inaudible

**A:** For some time, the character creates fuss over dying in the hands of a woman in the film. I ask him how could he die if all others who could kill him were already dead. "I am the only one who can kill you," I say. (laughs) If he has to die in the hands of the hero, he is not there. He (NTR) is in the jail. An old man, Rama Rao and another Bhanumathi were put in the jail. Being a disappointed (jilted) lover, Chandirani has to sacrifice her life.

**Q:** The movie was good.

**A:** Yes, the movie came out good. We strived a lot for the film.

Host: It was recently released in Hyderabad. Just 3 months ago. I saw it in the morning show.

Hmmm

**Q:** Various films are broadcast on the TV but not ..

**A:** True. We have a copy of Chandirani which we brought here (Pune) to get screened but came to know that only those pictures which get awards would be screened.

Host: Award is not the criterion. Award pictures are screened specially.

Then they can screen it late night. Each person tells us about different rules. Vipranarayana bagged President award but even that was not given screening.

Host: Balaraju was screened. It is a lengthy film.

Second host: Was Balaraju screened?

It was screened in Madras.

Second host: No, it was not screened here. (Pune)

**Q:** From the initial days of your entry into the film industry, till date.., what were the changes you could witness?

**A:** I gave a chance for M.S. Viswanathan to score the music for Chandirani.

**Q:** We will speak about music later. From the initial days of your entry into the film industry, till date, what were the changes you could witness?

**A:** After 1969, I took Anta Mana Manchike. That was one of the best pictures I directed.



**Q:** Till Chandirani, you took serious pictures. Suddenly why did you switch to Varudu Kavali type of movie.

**A:** Varudu Kavali. It was directed by my husband based on The Fabulous Seniorita. He wanted to take it since long. Vipranarayana, Chintamani.. Actually, we would not have taken Chintamani but a writer Narayana Elangal associated with us. He took the Tamil version and I took the Telugu film. He had the rights and without wasting it, I took it. Neither me nor my husband wanted to take it. That is why we took Bhakta Chintamani. Chintamani is a little bit vulgar. What we did was convert it into Bhakta Chintamani. (Inaudible). But now it is running successfully. Just like Malleeswari. In those days, the audience did not receive any picture well. The brains of Telugu people are like tubelights. Initially, they will not like it but after other people start praising, they will understand the greatness of the movie.

**Q:** Tell us the differences and changes in the technicalities of the movies.

**A:** There have been many changes and improvements in the technical field. But the fundamental element of film industry then, now and even in the future will be team work, sincere effort. Just like BN Reddy garu took the films with commitment, though not so prolonged, they should take movies in the stipulated duration by adjusting to the modern times. Is not K. Viswanath taking movies these days? I keep watching Viswanath for comparison. Of course, he is a different type of director but his work shows his sincerity. His deeksha towards work gets exhibited in his films. If you consider work as deeksha, there is no time frame for it. Both then and now, it will give the same result. I took one children's film, Bhakta Dhruva Markandeya, a successful movie. I kept telling the children and extracted the maximum from them during that movie. In the limited space of the studio, I tried my best to bring out the most possible. Work done with commitment gives the best result and this principle has never changed. There are many changes compared to then and now. Some changes are proceeding towards betterment and at the same time, some others are going towards degeneration. 50:50. Technically, there have been many improvements but acting skills and actors' concentration have gone below the standards. Do you agree?

Host: Yes, definitely.

Technicalities have improved. Do you not feel how good would Malleeswari have been if taken in colour? In those days, there were no Urvasis or Menakas (extremely beautiful women). What award was given for Malleeswari? It did not get a national award. What award was given for acting in that movie? At that time, these awards were not there and just because the awards were not there, we cannot say they were not good films or not good actors.

Had modern day facilities been available during those days, those pictures would have been fabulous. Don't we think so?

One pathetic thing is that after seeing modern films these days, people are still saying that movies in olden days were really good, even when there has been a lot of improvement technically. People say old movies are still gold.

I came into the industry in 1939 and completed 50 years last December (1989).

**Q:** Can you tell us your opinion about music?

**A:** We composed music for Malleeswari in this same house. This is a lucky house. We took Malleeswari when we were here. Even B.N. Reddy used to come to this house. I used to sit in this hall and choose the ragas which could go into the film. Rajeswara Rao used to cooperate a lot. He is a creative man. He is a senior. I am his fan. He is my guru. During my childhood, I used to listen to his songs. It is a god's gift. Music comes out in perfect form only when some persons do it.

Rajeswara Rao, me and BN worked on two films and both of them are outstanding.

Again BN alone does not have such a hit. Swarga Seema and Malleeswari are his best pictures. Of them, Malleeswari music is the best. If I am there, I never will leave the music to others, even when music directors might think otherwise.

**Q:** Some people say that pictures for which you and Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao garu scored the music have the Telugu nature.

**A:** Take Chakrapani. I scored the music for it completely. You can see the Telugu tradition in it. I gave a classical touch to it. There are two Tyagaraja keertanas in it. Due to the love I have towards my father, I try to put the music he loves into my films at least

in one song. My husband always used to say that my love towards father was killing him. He used to say that when the staff go out for smoking, I kept singing Carnatic classical music and that he was not able to bear that.

However, in long duration, it withstood the test of time. The two Carnatic songs were taken with some Tamil touch and they were picturised well. I think it was in 1963 or 1964.

**Q :** (Inaudible)... The nativity which he used to show in songs is again visible in Bhanumathi. But the nativity was not carried forward to Tamil or Kannada. What sort of instruments did you use to bring in that nativity?

**A:** Yes, I used to use less instruments for music. What do we use for music? Nothing like guitar. I used harmonium, violin, tabla, mridangam, flute which can reflect nativity and allow the voice to be heard above the music. Now, Ilayaraja is also many modern music instruments. Of late, it is rythm which is being given prominence in films. Earlier, it used to be music. That is the difference. In the name of rythm, the artistes are just jumping up and down. Earlier, they used to sing and now, they are jumping.

Now, artistes are becoming hysteric and going on moving or running. It has become more like an exercise. Can you repeat at least one song tuned these days. Be it Ilayaraja or Bolayaraja? Hearing to those old songs is like a divine experience. Why are people hearing to those songs even today? Because they have the soul in it.

Host: That quality is missing

I used to fix a tune after seeing the lyrics and Rajeswara Rao garu used to finalise those tunes which would suit my voice.

**Q :** I have 2-3 more important questions. For the first time, you acted with NTR in Malleeswari and then he became popular. How did he behave on the sets?

**A:** Inaudible. He acted were very well in that movie. Even I was given a good character in that movie. However, he always stands second to me whatever he did. I do not know why it was like that. May be due to my personality or so. He got a good name in this movie and he was booked for another movie which also became a hit. Then he too gained confidence.



**Q:** After Malleeswari, what picture did he act in?

**A:** I do not remember accurately. No, it is not Madhura..... (inaudible). I think it is Alibaba 40 thieves. It was in Deva Colour. Even that movie was a big hit. I had a good character in it and I acted well in it.

**Q:** Yes, that movie has good music too and it ran for 100 days.

**A:** It was shot in Salem and Madurai, I was given awards. Those days are different. Artistes were given respect. Then he started having more confidence in himself. NTR garu used to have a lot of respect towards me.

**Q:** You acted with NTR and ANR. Then you worked with other artistes later. How do you compare working with them and now?

**A:** You are asking me differently. I did not act with them. In fact, they acted with me. When they were not popular or chief minister, they acted with Bhanumathi and became big. I am adjusting to all times. There are people who consider acting with me as a great thing. Even youngsters acting with me these days are also growing up in their career.

I never care for people acting beside me. People booking me never think of co-actors. They think that my presence alone makes the difference. People acting with me make little difference. They pretty well know that those beside me have little significance if I am there. There is no question. It is more like who is acting with me but not I acting with them.

I think once it was Ramana Reddy who acted with me. No... In Mattilo Manikyam, Prabhakar Reddy acted with me. Where is he now? Even Gemini also acted with me.

**Q:** NTR directed Tatamma Katha with you.

**A:** He took the movie with a good opinion.

**Q:** Do you accept NTR as a director?

**A:** He could be a successful director because he was more interested to be a producer. When I take up direction too, the producer in me comes out at times but I push him away and continue with my direction. You should have that capacity to remain a director. For those who continuously think of money, it is very hard, they cannot do it. They cannot be successful. I can tell you that much.

For those who take more care about money, direction becomes secondary. For a director who has the urge to take good films, the individual should have artistic taste and creative genius. Whenever money comes to mind, I try to push it to the secondary or tertiary place. If money is prominent, some aspects of direction get pushed back.

In Kannada, you took one film ..... (inaudible)

He was not a political figure then.

(Inaudible)

Why did you confine yourself to Tamil and Telugu? Why did you not go to Kannada?

I told you earlier. I am not interested in going to great heights. I am more a family woman and I give importance to my husband and son and also my studio. I take up films only when I like the character. Only for two films, Malleeswari and Alibaba, I went out of station to act. Luckily, my mother-in-law used to be with me. Whenever I used to go out of station, my mother-in-law used to accompany me. She used to be of company to me and I used to feel at home in her presence. I used to feel better if she was with me.

Else, I used not to do out of station movies. I used to cancel them. I got an offer for a second time asking me to come out of station to Salem but I did not like the character. It was released in Modern Theatres. There was some other latest picture too which they wanted to take in Coimbatore. I refused to do it.

**Q:** In the modern generation directors, you worked with Ramineedu.

**A:** Ramineedu is a director with good taste. He tried to shoot good films but luck did not favour him. Palnati Yuddham was not a picture which he should have done because it was a lavish picture involving a lot of expenditure.

Anuragam is a Bengali picture, Maa. Annai picture was taken as Mayadhup..... (inaudible). But in the original book, the character which I portrayed was not at all significant. It was a small character.

But the Shahukar Janaki character is a significant and lengthy one. I asked the directors to improve my character and got it done. For this picture, I did not at least one dialogue written by the dialogue writer. All are modified dialogues. I got a book from Nellore and changed all the dialogues.

I never recite dialogues written by others. For any picture, it is the same. Even in Tamil. I take personal interest in dialogues, music, characterisation and screenplay and improve my role in all these areas. Even for Mangammagari Manavadu, there is nothing interesting in the movie. I sat for 5-6 sittings and planned everything. That was why Kodi Ramakrishna never used to take a film without my presence. Now, he has become very busy. The picture in which I helped him had been a success.

(Inaudible)

**Q:** I don't know whether you will like this question. I do not know much about music.

**A:** You book a popular music director. His previous picture has been a hit and we do not know why. We do not know why the picture was a hit, whether due to music, or actors or story.

But once the picture is a success, people will start accepting him as a music director. The producers of this film do not think about other factors but focus only on one thing. We booked that music director and there will be a good market, that is how they think. These days, the value of a person is immaterial. Producers are thinking on the above lines and booking the people for their films. Even awards have become the same. It has become more like earning than giving based on one's merit. Even without merit, some people are buying awards.

Similarly, even in the case of music, people only see if that man is part of a successful movie and if he has one such movie, then book him. We do not know how good he will compose music in this film.



People like us who have some knowledge about music keep thinking how to add value to the existing things. We think how we can improve the song, where to place it in the film to have better impact, how to get it sung effectively.

Music directors these days do not think of all these. Only rhythm is more important. He tries to compose tunes based on his earlier success because that feat clicked once and money is more important for him. He has been hired to rake in the moolah and so, he does what should be done to bring in money.

This type of attitude will become a torture for artistes like me who have knowledge of music. Others who focus on money, will sing and leave the premises. When I try to modify something in a film, the producer takes the side of the music director whom he hired and that is where differences crop up.

When the producer is not able to place his confidence in me but on the music director, what can I do?

The producer says I should sing whatever the music director asks me to and this is where I do not compromise.

I am speaking about music because I do not sing whatever the music director composes even though he might be a popular person.

K.V. Mahadevan knows about me well. He tells me to take the harmonium and go home. That Puhalendi used to come and sit here only to discuss music with me.

In Mangammagari Manavadu, K.V. Mahadevan composed Sri Suryanarayana meluko. I have the tape and will play it for you if you want. I am telling this not for criticism but as an example. He composed it like this because Mangamma sings it and she is an old woman.

He kept the tune as a folk song because it was sung early in the morning. Meluko, meluko... the tune was being dragged but on hearing it, I felt it was not good. I told him I will not sing. I told him there should be some speciality in the raga. People expect some speciality from my voice.

I called him on phone and told him Mama, the tune is not good. He came to my house. Just as music directors try to repeat the feats which gave them success, I also had the music of movies Malleeswari, Laila Majnu and others which were hit, on my mind.

I had the 'bandi paata' raga in mind. Basing on it, I tuned the same song 'Sri Surya narayana'. (Sings). Are you able to find the difference?

People need not ask me about music. I myself will tell you about it in a detailed manner. I can compose tunes basing on a small clue and because god gifted m with such creativity, I need not care about others. I just keep singing and automatically, a tune comes out. That is God's gift to me.

So I do not stick to what the music directors ask me to do. I make my own changes. If I am asked to stick to what they want, then I just sing and come back without any involvement.

But if I make any change and sing it with involvement, it will definitely be a hit. I just told you an example.

That man told that he tuned Oho ho Pavurama. The song was written very well by Rajanikantha but the tune was like this. (Bhanumathi sings). I saw Blood and Sand, and sang in a different tune taking cue from Rita Hayworth's humming catching a guitar. (She sings again). And people appreciated it.

So, somebody need not tell Bhanumathi about music. Boasting about myself will appear to be too much and that is why I did not speak about it so far. Coming to the music part of it, I will really appreciate if somebody composes good music. In this area, M.S. Viswanath is a genius. He brought about a revolution in film music.

Earlier, only Karntaka and Hindi films used to have good tunes. In Tamil pictures, music used to be boring and repetitive. But Viswanath changed it in such a way that film songs used to be heard again and again.

Even K.V. Mahadevan used to compose most of his tunes based on Telugu folk songs. (all three people - Bhanumathi, two hosts speak about music. Connection to a phone call) Rajeswara Rao and I belong to first generation. Viswanath is of second generation.

(Inaudible)

I and Rajeswara Rao used to work well together. These days, K.V. Mahadevan has become old. It is Puhalendi who does the work for him and so, he composes tunes which are of modern age. Mahadevan has become old. He is more than 70 years and he can't sit.

When he was young, he composed good music. I and he used to sit in front of each other and work. In Swarga Seema, I composed a tune and he likes it very much. It was taken by Annadurai. (inaudible)

Madhura Vennela Reyi... (She sings). I sang it using a harmonium in base voice.

Host: You are singing very good. See I am not able to provoke you to sing.

No need. If it is music, I will speak by myself by getting provoked. If anybody composes good tunes, I will appreciate it. If the tune is good, I will sing. It is not that I will not sing songs composed by others. I will not sing without my interference in composing of music for that particular song. As long as I sing, I will look into the good and bad of it. In my pictures, I will look into the music of all the songs and that is why they will be good.

Host: Rajeswara Rao garu (inaudible)

I and Rajeswara Rao together worked for some films. For ....., neither I nor Rajeswara Rao garu worked. You are asking me who worked on it. It is a Marathi song. (She sings).

There was one Panigrahi, an Oriya singer, who came to Rajeswara Rao seeking a chance. He sang this song and I immediately said that it was good and put it in our Ashtapadi. It is based on Saavhare song. Later, I composed the humming and charanalu.

I find some tune or something as inspiration and I always feel that a song should have classical touch. Rajeswara Rao garu also thought on the same lines.

The Preme Neramouna song in Laila Majnu, C.R. Subbaraman was our senior. He is a very great person. He was a genius and used to be very smart, more than Rajeswara Rao and others. He knew English, Carnatic and Hindustani music.

Similarly, I also know all these three types of music. Rajeswara Rao garu also knows about the three types. Of course, he was having less knowledge of English music but he had the knowledge. When people have knowledge of music, just as they say that if you have hair, you can go for any type of hair style. Just like that, if people have knowledge and merit, you can use it whichever way you want.

It is difficult for people who have no knowledge but Rajeswara Rao garu, C.R. Subbaraman and Bhanumathi and M.S. Viswanath, if these four people combine you



can get very good English music, perfect Hindustani and south Indian classical (Carnatic) music. Of course, Ghantasala does not come into this category.

We four are familiar with all three types of music and so, we could mould it into any type. When we have that creative genius in us, songs can easily be tuned into various forms. We could change songs from English to Tamil to Carnatic. That is why we could give different tunes in various films and also sing. Else, it would have been very tough. Audience will get bored with the monotonous tunes.

Hearing to a humming in Hamlet, I composed Preme Neramouna in Laila Majnu (she sings).

C.R. Subbaraman used to say that the song showcases my creativity. That song became very popular. The remaining songs he composed and I also helped him in whatever way I could.

I told you already. I sang only when I wanted to and liked it, either in Hindi, Telugu or Tamil.

Then, in Batasari picture, Tad..... sang a song. My son used to play that old record and I remembered it. (She sings).

I don't remember the English lyrics. My son knows it. I liked that song. So, I composed O Baatasaari song in the film based on it. (She sings)

Venu does not know anything in music. Apart from him, T.V. Raju also does not know much about music. I was busy with Chintamani and they copied all Hindi tunes like Azad. I had no time. I was working in 18 pictures simultaneously.

I never knew about them and felt disappointed with their work. May be they worked with others but they had no ability to work with Bhanumathi. Having sung songs for reputed music directors, I told them that I sang songs without putting in my music sense in it. I sang copied tunes and composed two songs, a cradle song and a dream song. The rest were copied tunes of Hindi songs.

Venu composed one old tune with a harmonium but I did not like it. He was a close friend of my husband. He was good at heart but he does not know music. Keeping him as music director, we started Batasari. For his lifetime, he could never compose Batasari song.

I feel proud that I composed tunes for popular songs at least in the background. I do not want a name. I am successful as a music director too.

Host: Even in these days, I keep hearing to your songs madam.

May be, if I would have just sung the songs like any playback singer, my songs would be among many without any significance and I would have had a good name. Everywhere, I have a bad name for interfering into the music part of the film.

Host: May be, your interference made the songs exceptional.

I used to interfere because I was more interested in making my songs hits and giving entertainment to the audience. I do not care about their name.

If you bring somebody else's shirt and ask me to wear it, how can it be possible. How can you ask me to eat food cooked by somebody else? I will cook whatever I like and eat it with pleasure. That is my type of living. Even in characterisation, I used to take utmost care.

**Q:** By the time of Vichitra Vivaha Bandham, seniors like Siva Subrahmanyam were not there. Ghantasala was there.

**A:** For that film, I composed the music. My husband likes Nagu momu song and so I changed it into Bheem Palas raga and sang it so as to be appreciated by the people.

Host: Changing the classical songs to suit to common audience's taste..

I like it very much. Balamurali and I believe in the same principle. What is tradition? If somebody says something, should we follow the same? Why should we not do some creative work?

How beautifully did Balamurali sing Endaro Mahanubhavulu but Tamilians do not like it. Should it be sung in the old tune and will Rama come then? What I say is does anyone know that Tyagaraja sang it in the same swara? Who composed the swara for the song?

While singing the same in Telugu, they used to include Charma mudi, Marma mudi and convert it like break masters. My father used to sing Pancharatnalu by Tyagaraja. There used to be a lot of devotion (ardrata) in the songs. Instead, it seems to be like going to the third floor from first floor and then coming down to second floor or at times, dropping to first floor.

**Q:** Just for information sake, I am asking you. Nagaiah garu sang Tyagaraja songs. What is your opinion about them?

**A :** Nagaiah garu is well versed in Carnatic music. He sang the songs with a lot of devotion just as in Sankarabharanam. At that time, Nagaiah garu sang with devotion and there is nothing to criticise in it.

At the same time, Balamurali also tries to blend the classical and the emotional components in the classical songs. Here in Tamil Nadu, the Brahmins feel that they are the authority over Tyagaraja kritis. They act as though they have heard to Tyagaraja singing the songs. I really become irritated hearing to such words.

Bheem Palas and Abheri ragas have similarities. I will put Nagu Momu song in Bheem Palas raga because it is a movie. Nagu Momu was always sung by men and never by women.

I do not remember MS (Subbalakshmi) singing that song. My husband likes that song a lot. Somebody sang this song in a completely traditional form. (She sings)

Who will hear to this song? To make it more interesting I had to choose Bheem Palas raga.

If old timers sing it in the traditional form, there is nothing to criticise because they could have learnt it that way but if I put the same in the movie, who will hear it?

So there was criticism against me that I had spoilt the Carnatic music and tradition. I was told that there were programmes on criticism on the radio. This is just foolishness. But that song became an extra attraction to the film. The other song, Neetiloni Ningilona was also drawn from an English song.

That person who sings and organises chorus does not know anything about it. He comes on the TV too. What is his name? He even passed away.

M.B. Srinivas. He does not know much about music.

Later, I composed Vinnava. My husband told me that he had told Srinivas about me but gave an opportunity to him just because he requested for doing a Telugu movie. I composed all the songs. He did not do at least one song but we gave the credits to him with my name under supervision.



**Q:** There is a lot of English music influence on your songs. For example, in Varudu Kavalenu, there are many English tunes.

**A:** Adapting English music is main work for me, Subbaraman and MS Viswanath. Even Rajeswara Rao does the same with ease. Hear to Chandralekha music. That music when she dances. I like it very much. He adapted from English music. He has that skill. There is nothing like English music. Music is one across the world. It is how we adapt it. We have to mould it according to our need.

**Q:** Chandrababu sings one song in Tamil. In Telugu, what is that song?

(Inaudible)

**Q:** Tell us about your journey as a writer.

**A:** I told you earlier. My father got me trained in Chandassu since my early days in films. I used to listen to Kaviraju Viswanath's humorous stories like Dongatakam, Asampurna Ramayanam and enjoy a lot. Since my childhood, I like humour.

MG even made me write Mani ..... (inaudible) in 1943. Later, he used to correct the stories written by me. Matured writing comes after 35, said Pearl S. Buck in her My Several Words. I started writing when I was 30 years only. I wrote Attagari Kathalu and Bhanumathi Kadhanikalu.

For some time, I wrote extempore. For me, pen and slate give the same experience. For some people, they have to think a lot to write. For me, it is mechanical. The pen goes on by its own. Just as letters get typed in computer, my writing also goes on.

I get immense pleasure in writing. If I write a good story, I feel so happy which cannot be gained even by giving me lakhs of rupees. I do not know why I enjoy writing so much.

At times, I like to do a painting. I did these both for the last time in 1964. Had I done painting, I would have excelled even in it. God gave me everything. I like to do painting but do not have time. I gave my paintings to many and they have taken them away.

The government gave me land in Thambaram. When I first grew sugarcane, the government even gave me Rs 3 as an award. Later, we switched to paddy. For 35 years,

we did not buy rice in our house. We used to get the paddy grown in our fields. We even cultivated sesame and extracted oil from it.

Whatever we wanted, we used to sow.

**Q:** Did you involve yourself in farm activities?

**A:** Yes, I cut the crop, tie it into bundles and do many things. Gardening and agriculture are my hobbies. I have a lot of interest in both activities.

Now, I am old and cannot do only some activities. Any sapling I plant grows very well.

Host: Inaudible

For the first time, it was given 30 years back. At that time, I did not go and that is a different issue. After shooting the children's film, again they offered me for not taking it earlier. I was chosen as the best lady director.

**Q:** Tell us about your international awards.

**A:** I got for Antastulu. They invited me to Sydney. I did not go but Nageswara Rao went. Antastulu and Palnati Yuddham bagged national awards. Annai also got an award.

Malleeswari would also have got an award but at that time, there were no awards. In 1954, national awards were actually inaugurated by us. We went to the function at that time. Casper was there at that time. I and my husband went. B.N. Reddy garu did not come. Vasan garu, Salarjung, (inaudible), also came. Lalita and Padmini also came.

**Q:** Tell us about Padma awards.

**A:** I got doctorates twice. Padmasri was given long ago (in 1965-66). They did not think of giving me Padma Bhushan or Padma Vibhushan. Tirupati university gave me doctorate.

**Q:** When was Raghupati Venkaiah award given?

**A:** In 1985. MGR.....

In 1979-80, I was visiting professor in film institute. At that time, I inducted many artistes there into films.

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