



National Film Archive of India

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
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Interview of Veteran Playback Singer P. Leela by Randor Guy

00:00:00

Q: This is Randor Guy interviewing Smt. P Leela, one of the senior most playback singers of South Indian Cinema. A playback singer is something peculiar to Indian cinema. In Indian films, most of the performing artistes, whether they are actors or actresses do not always sing in their own voices. And music forms a great part of an Indian film. And there are a number of songs made in any film in India. So when the performing artiste is not able to sing with his or her own voice in songs in a film, the service of the singer, male or female as the case maybe is sort. And the singer sings the songs earlier in a recording theatre. And these songs are picturized later with the performing artiste moving his lyrics to the song and the lyrics of the song. this singer who sings or lends his voice as expression goes is known as a payback singer. That is something unique to Indian film. Such playback singers are super stars and stars themselves in their own right and enjoy as much popularity the on-screen performing artistes themselves. This institution is very characteristic of Indian cinema. And there are a number of such playback singers for example P Leela in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and other languages. Or Lata Mangeshkar in Hindi or Asha Bhosle, her sister, Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh all of them, Kishore Kumar, they all are as much super stars as the film actors and actresses themselves. They enjoy such popularity and fan following. Which is something that surprises the observer from other countries. P Leela is a trained musician, classically trained in Carnatic music, a music of

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South India. And she has been in films for over 40 years. She has sung literally 1000s of songs in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, almost all languages and she has been the recipient of several awards for state level and central level and from a number of private organizations which give award to performing artistes. This interview with Leela, the first one takes place on the morning of Monday, May 29th 1989 at her residence at Raja Annamalai Puram in Madras. Mrs. Leela speaks in Tamil.

00:03:18

Q: Greetings madam.

A: Greetings.

Q: I am happy to meet you. We are grateful to you for allowing us to interview you for this oral history project for the National Film Archives of India. On behalf of NFAI and its director Mr. P K Nair who is your fan...he asks often about you. He was the one who pushed me to get in touch with you and do the interview. On behalf of him I thank you. I also thank you on behalf of film historians and researches who will benefit from this. I am personally grateful to you. You may answer as I ask the questions. If you are unable to recollect, we may cut and roll again, just like cinema.

00:04:14

Q: Which is your native place?

A: My native place is Palakkad district. But I was born and raised in Ernakulam. My father was working there. He spent 25 years in service there. My mother's name is Meenakshi Amma.

Q: Where did you start learning music? At what age?

A: My father was fond of music.

Q: Does he sing?

A: He doesn't sing but has a great taste. Music was life for him. I have two sisters. They were taught music first. I would be sitting there listening to it and would repeat. My guru lived in Thrippoonithura. I learnt first from him. He was my first guru.

Q: From whom did you learn music formally?

A: Yes. My second guru was Vadakkancheri Rama Bhagavathar. He was in Ernakulam earlier, then came to Madras.

Q: You said Vadakkancheri Rama Bhagavathar. There was one musician called Mani Bhagavathar.

A: Yes, his brother. Rama Bhagavathar came to Madras later. He told my father that there won't be much future for music in Ernakulam. "I am going to Madras, you come there. I will teach you" he said.

Q: When did you come to Madras?

A: In 1944. I would go every month to Guruvayur. Before coming to Madras, I went to Guruvayur to sing. An unexpected incident happened there. That's why I am telling you.

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Q: What incident?

A: The temple door was shut when I was singing. And when they do that, they would play the drum and one can't listen anything else. I was feeling sad as the door was shut. I was thinking maybe the god didn't like my song. When I was standing there, the door opened and an old man came from inside. He must at least be 80 years. He asked my father who is that girl who is singing. He said "she is my daughter. We are going to Madras. So she wanted to come here to sing and

get god's blessings. The door is shut and we are feeling sad about it." He said "Please don't worry. Your daughter will do good. Please go ahead." My father asked what was his name. He replied "Krishnan Nair" and left the place. My father felt he didn't even take his address. He went after him but couldn't figure which direction he went. Whether he disappeared or took some other route I don't know. But that incident gave a lot of assurance to me. I felt confident to go to Madras. As if god himself came in human form to tell me this.

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Q: Under whom did you learn music in Madras?

A: When we came, I started with Rama Bhagavathar. It was a Gurukul tradition. I used to live with him, go along with him to his concerts. If he starts classes in the morning at 7:30 or 8, it will go up to 1 pm. Everyday. Evening if he starts at 4, it will go till 10. That is how gurukul works.

Q: A rigorous training you mean

A: Yes. Day and night. As soon as I came, I participated in Music academy Pallavi singing competition and won the first prize. It is my guru's blessings and my parents' blessings. More than anything, Guruvayurappan's blessings. I won that in 1944. The judges were Palakkad Mani Iyer, G N Balasubramaniam. M D Ramanathan was my competitor. I sang how I was taught to sing. They sang a Pallavi and asked me to repeat. I did and won the prize.

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Q: You won what M D Ramanathan couldn't

A: I don't look at it that way. It is all Guruvayurappan's blessings.

Q: How did you come to the field of playback singing?

A: That was an accident. I didn't come to Madras, attracted to cinema. I thought I'll learn classical music for 5-6 years and go back home. So, when I was singing as a radio artiste in Columbia...

Q: You were singing in All India Radio by then?

A: Yes. From 1945 onwards. Producer G P Narayanan heard my voice there.

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Q: He made a film called Kangkanam

A: Yes. He was looking for a new voice. One Mr. Ganapathy Raman was the manager in Columbia. He was asked to try my voice. They asked me to sing and I sang. I never knew what was playback. I asked him 'what is a playback'. He said you need not worry about anything. There will be a music director. He would tell you what to sing. You can just follow his instructions. I did what they asked me to do. They liked it.

Q: Which film was this for?

A: Kangkanam.

Q: I see in that film only? Menaka was the heroine.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember where was this recorded?

A: An arrangement was made on the terrace of a studio

Q: Where was this?

A: On Katcheri road

Q: I've heard of it.

A: In those days, there was no theatre. To avoid echo, they would stack pots here and there. That's how they recorded in those days.

Q: There won't be any studio or anything?

A: No. They used to do like this.

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Q: You sang the first song for menaka?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was the music director for that film?

A: H R Padmanabha Sastry.

Q: I see. He has done Telugu films too

A: It was initially 2 Tamil films and then it was Grihana.

Q: There were 2 Grihana. Which one was this?

A: There was one with K Ramaswamy.

Q: I see the one B N Rao directed

A: Yes.

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Q: Who was the music director for that?

A: That was also Padmanabha shastri.

Q: <inaudible> was your second film?

A: Yes.

Q: Both were Tamil films only?

A: Yes

Q: After that which film did you sing for?

A: I sang in a Kannada film after that. But I didn't have a good relation after that. After that I continued learning music from C R Subbaraman

Q: You learnt classical music?

A: Yes. He has taught me for 3 years.

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Q: You said you sang in Kannada films. Do you remember which film?

A: Mahatma Kabir

Q: Who were the artistes in it?

A: Subbaiah Naidu

Q: C R Subbaraman was the music for it?

A: Yes.

Q: You didn't know Kannada then, right?

A: No, I didn't know. I sing well in Malayalam.

Q: Where did they record those songs?

A: Pragathi studios I think, in Madras. It was somewhere near Teynampet. There were hardly any recording theatres in those days.

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Q: In the days when recording theatres weren't there, how was the recording method? Every artiste had their own mic?

A: No, nothing like that. Artiste would have one mic; the orchestra would have one mic that's all.

Q: If they wanted chorus section in it?

A: They would stand behind, that's all. Not like these days where every singer would have their own booths and mics. But there is one thing. They were not in a hurry to record. They would do enough rehearsals before going for a take. Even 4 or 5 days rehearsals would be taken. They will record only after they are satisfied that it has become perfect.

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Q: You have sung in Telugu. Which film did you sing first?

A: The first one was for Ghantasala. First was for Mana Desam.

Q: That was N T Ramarao's first film.

A: Yes. Sobhanachala studios. We did the recording there. I sang 4 songs.

Q: For Mana Desam?

A: No one song for Mana Desam and rest for Keelu Gurram. Ghantasala was the music director for that too.

Q: Keelu Gurram was a super hit film, wasn't it?

A: Yes. Nageshwara rao, Anjali devi.

Q: Do you remember the song you sang for the Rani?

A: Yes. Her name was Balamani.



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Q: They leave her in the forest.

A: Yes. I sang 4 songs for that film.

Q: I saw it when I was in the school

A: You remember more than I do.

Q: After Keelu Gurram?

A: I went to Vijaya Vauhini studios. Gunasundari katha, Patala Bhairavi, Kalyanam pannippar...

Q: You sang a lot of songs for Gunasundari Katha

A: Yes for junior Sriranjani.

Q: Who was the music director for it? Was it Ghantasala?

A: No, it was Ogirala Ramachandra rao.

Q: The old music director. I've met him

A: Yes, he would make me practise the songs over and over again.

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Q: There are different methods of writing a song. First make the tune and write the lyrics. Or write and then compose tune for it. How was it in those days? In 1945,46,47..

A: It was done together. Music director and the lyricist. One would change for the other. It is all adjusting to make it better. Producer, director, music director, lyricist all 4 would be there while making it. Only after the director okays it, we would go for recording. Only if it matches their situation, they would go ahead. They won't make one tune and finalise it. It has to be consulted with the director to see if it suits the situation. Only then, it would be confirmed. If it is not okay,

they should find one more tune. That is how it used to be in those days.

Q: The Gunasundari Katha is directed by K V Reddy.

A: Yes.

Q: Would he come and be part of the song making?

A: Oh yes. Everyone would be there. He would surely be there. He would be there to explain to the singers. He would tell me the situation, how it will be filmed, how it will be performed. He wants me internalize the feeling and then sing. If it wasn't effective, he would tell me again. He gives detailed feedback. Those people won't let you go without getting what they want. Also, there is a satisfaction in us singers that we have sung well.

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Q: When you are doing that, would Nagi Reddy come to the studio?

A: He would come, watch and go. Mainly it would be director. There was a producer Chakrapani, you remember? He would sit throughout. He would make you sing over and over again till he is happy. He was stricter than the music director.

Q: You didn't know Telugu then right?

A: No but I learnt it. I had to because you can sing understanding the emotions. Be it a happy song, a pathos or any other emotion, you can sing with emotions and expressions if you understand it, know the meaning.

Q: You can sing with feelings then

A: Absolutely.

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Q: Your songs from Gunasundari Katha were all popular. Do you remember any of them?

A: 'O Matha' is a very famous song from the film. All of it I must say

Q: There was one song when Shiva is going up. She sings from below. I have seen it.

A: Yes.

Q: I couldn't watch it recently, Gunasundari Katha. To listen to your songs

A: It was made in Tamil also.

Q: For the film 'Kalyanam panni paar', that is 'Pelli chesi choodu' have you sung both in Telugu and Tamil?

A: Yes. In both. That was my first playback for G Varalakshmi. She was only singing for herself before that. From this film onwards, she did not.

Q: And she agreed to it?

A: The producers felt it has to be changed.

Q: How did she agree? I've heard she is quite short tempered

A: If the producer says so, what can you do? I don't know what they discussed. In those times, there was a respect for Producers and Directors. Things would go as per their decisions.

Q: And people liked them

A: Yes, and they still remember it. They still ask for those songs in concerts.

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Q: Do you remember any song from 'Kalyanam panni paar'?

A: 'Ezhu malai aandavane'. I sang 4 or 5 songs in it.

Q: 'Ezhukondalavada'

A: 'Ramana..'

Q: It is a song like a lullaby to the god, right?

A: Yes.

Q: N T Ramarao acted in it

A: Yes

Q: What songs have you sung in 'Maya Bazaar'?

A: 'Neethana ennai azhaithathu'

Q: The one on the boat?

A: 4 or 5 songs were there

Q: It was in Telugu?

A: I sang in both. In Tamil as well.

Q: Who was the music director for it?

A: M D R Nagesh

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Q: Did Rajeshwara rao work on it for some time?

A: No let me correct. Maya bazaar was Ghantasala. There was a Tamil film I did in the beginning. That was M D R Nageshwara rao

Q: Rajeshwara rao wasn't there is it?

A: No, he came later

Q: Not when you were there?

A: No

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Q: You were singing a lot in Vauhini. Were they using many instruments there?

A: Not many, there was organ. They were the first to get it. There would be an in-house orchestra. There wouldn't be as much as you see today but there were quite a few.

Q: Do you remember who used to play the organ?

A: There was a person called Krishnamoorthy.

Q: He is still working. As an assistant to Viswanathan.

A: Yes

Q: Was there a Jimmy from America who used to play accordion there?

A: I don't remember well. Actually, I don't know people in the orchestra that well. We would rehearse together. Ghantasala would instruct how to play what. Other than that, I don't know most of them. I do know some of them.

Q: There was an advocate who used to play instruments. Who wore thick glasses...

A: If I see them, I may recollect. I remember faces, not names.

Q: He used to play accordions

A: That's what. If I see them, I can remember.

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Q: When you sing for Vijaya Vauhini, recording theatres have come right?

A: Yes, it had come.



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Q: The makeshift arrangement on terrace had gone by then

A: Yes. It had a proper setup with all machines and infrastructure. But singers didn't have separate booths. We all stood in the main hall and sang. There was an engineer called Krishna Iyer.

Q: I know he passed away recently

A: Oh, did he? He was in Hyderabad Sarathi studios. He was all in one. Viswanathan, the director now.

Q: Yes K Vishwanath who made Sankarabharanam

A: Yes, he was the recordist then

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Q: You said you sang in Keelu Gurram. Who was the music director for Keelu Gurram?

A: Ghantasala. There was a fight for that film.

Q: What was the fight?

A: The producer wanted the actress to sing the song herself. But when they tried her, the music director didn't like her singing the tune. She is a theatre actress. Has sung in plays before but you need to sing like how the music director wants also. He said if you give artistes of your choice, I can't compose music. Then they agreed and allowed him to choose artistes of his choice. Then they chose me.

Q: I see, he fought to make you sing?

A: Yes. I have no other business other than sing songs. More than Ghantasala, Sriramamurthy was a close friend. We have sung chorus together in many songs

Q: Which films?

A: I don't remember the names. The films by Balarama Iyer.

Q: The one who made films like Swapnasundari

A: Correct. I've sung for chorus in many songs. In Central studios as solo as well as chorus.

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Q: You said Central studios. Which films did you sing for, do you remember?

A: The first film I sang for was Mohini. MGR..

Q: MGR, Janaki, Balaiah..

A: Yes. After that Abhimanyu

Q: Do you remember the director of Mohini, Lanka Sathiyam?

A: Yes, very much

Q: He used to come for recordings?

A: Yes. One more film I did, Vijayakumari.

Q: It had a lot of dance I think

A: Yes, a lot

Q: Vyjayanthimala, Lalitha..

A: I didn't see the film only.

Q: It didn't run well I think

A: Yes

Q: T R Rajakumari did dual role in it

A: Yes. But I haven't seen the film

Q: It didn't run well

A: yes

Q: I have done a similar programme with him as well. He spoke for 6-7 hours. The recording used to happen in Jupiter?

A: Yes

Q: In Coimbatore, Central studios?

A: Yes. Same setup. No separate booth. We stood in the hall to sing.

Q: Do you remember who was the recordist?

A: It has been a long while. I don't remember quite well.

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Q: Did you sing only there, in Coimbatore or..

A: I sang in Ayyappan and one more film. There was a dance song in that film. Me and Jayalakshmi sang I think. I've sung the most in Dharmasasta in Malayalam. About Sabarimala. He asked me to act then.

Q: Who Srirama Naidu?

A: Yes. He asked me and I said 'I don't like it'. He asked 'why you don't like it'. I said 'I don't like it no other reason'. Wanted me to act and sing like how Jeevarathinam did. I said 'I don't like neither my father. I am good with singing.'

Q: He tried a lot to make you act.

A: Yes. Also the makers of Karaikkal Ammaiyar.

Q: When was it made you remember?

A: I don't remember the year. But they wanted me to act and sing in it. I said no to

that as well.

Q: Where was this Karaikkal Ammaiyar made?

A: Here in Madras. Mudaliar made it. It was a devotional subject. I politely refused it. They said “there are no men paired with you. There is no touching the body or anything to worry”. I said no.

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Q: You never felt like acting?

A: I have done drama in Malayalam. Radio plays

Q: That too with just voice

A: Yes.

Q: Not on stage

A: I have done that in school. The play that I did was ‘Seetha Kalyanam’. Viswamitra taking Rama and Lakshmana to the marriage. It had many songs. I have done that play.

Q: You never had a desire to act in films?

A: No never

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Q: In the Vijaya vauhini, Kalyanam panni paar, Patala bhairavi, Maya bazaar..have you sung in their Sowkar?

A: No I haven't. I sang in Manithan Maravillai.

Q: Gundamma Katha



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A: Yes I have sung in that

Q: Appu Chesi Pappu Koodu.

A: Yes. That. I've done that too.

Q: You have sung a lot for their films. In those days, when you go to sing, your father accompanies you?

A: Yes. He comes with me. I don't know about anything else other than singing.

Q: Everything else he looks after

A: Everything. When the mic is off, he would come and tell me 'what you've sung is not up to the mark. You have to sing it better. Before the music director says, you make it better'. And he leaves. He doesn't stay there. He would give me instructions. He would ask me to keep practicing and get better. Till the time he was alive, he never told 'you sang well'.

Q: To make you push your limits

A: Yes. To make me better. Always motivated to push my limits

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Q: Do you remember any song of that time? Can you sing a line or two?

A: Which one do you want?

Q: The song in Gunasundari Katha

A: O matha...I don't remember the lyrics well

Q: It is said that you have sung a duet with K V Mahadevan

A: Yes. Not many sang duets with him

Q: Not many know that he sings well. Everyone knows he is a music director

A: In Madana Mohini we both sang a song “Kannodu kannu”

Q: The one with T R Rajani?

A: I don't remember well. I haven't seen the film

Q: The one Vembu directed?

A: I think that is the one

Q: In 1948. T R Rajini..

A: Yes maybe

Q: It wasn't a success

A: I haven't seen the film. We both sang a duet and I have the recording with me.

Q: Do you remember the song?

A: I remember only a few lines. It has been so long

Q: He sings well? K V Mahadevan?

A: Oh yes. Very well indeed. I don't know why he didn't continue. I don't know if he is not interested in becoming a singer.

Recording interrupted

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Q: In the duet you sang, you have said somewhere that you have sung with M K Thyagaraja Bhagavathar. Before that tell me about Rajamukthi where you were supposed to sing

A: Before singing, Aalathur brothers taught me the song.

Q: Subramania Iyer, Srinivasa Iyer

A: Yes. Subramania Iyer was the one who taught me. The tune was his.

Q: Where did the rehearsal happen?

A: At Subbaraman's place only

Q: Where was Subbaraman, do you remember?

A: In Mylapore

Q: If there were music directors what was Subbaraman doing there?

A: He was doing the orchestration and all. They would do the tune and he would do the entire music direction of it. Orchestration, arrangement everything

Q: Do you remember the song?

A: No, I don't

Q: How did you miss the song?

A: I couldn't reach there on the date they asked me to go. I had agreed for a concert at that time.

Q: In Madras?

A: Yes. They asked me to cancel the concert. I said I can't come at the cost of cancelling the concert.

Q: They replaced it with M L Vasanthakumari

A: Yes.

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Q: Which film did you sing with the Bhagavathar? Shyamala?

A: Not Shyamala. After that he made his own film.

Q: He made a film called Puthu Vazhvu

A: No, I meant another film. Can't recollect now

Q: Puthu vazhvu, Sivagami..Sivagami is the film he left half way

A: No this was the one he made after coming from the jail

Q: If it is after jail, it is Rajamukthi

A: After that?

Q: Amarakavi.

A: Yes. That is the film.

Q: Amarakavi is the film he, Nagoor and Nageshwara rao got together and made

A: Yes.

Q: Which song did you sing in it?

A: Chedi maraivile oru poonkodi, and 2 or 3 other songs.

Q: Have you sung that duet?

A: Yes. I have sung for almost all of them.

Q: I still have that tape with me

A: You seem to remember all of that. I have forgotten it

Q: I have written a book with Bhagavathar's songs as I like them a lot.

A: I was initially scared of working with him

Q: Why?

A: He is such a big personality. People wait on the road for hours to get a glimpse

of him. I was so scared to even look at him. G Ramanathan did the music for it. He asked me why are you so scared of him? Don't be. Sing confidently. He is such a great artist. Naturally, I was feeling under confident.

Q: Did he tell you any words of motivation?

A: Yes, he did. He told me 'you sing so well. Why should you feel insecure?' I felt better and said I'll sing. One has to be careful while singing for G Ramanathan. He wouldn't compose simple tunes. There would be many sangathis in it. His songs are unique. Everyone struggles with his songs. One can't easily sing them.

Q: He would compose only like that? Not have easy tunes

A: I have sung a lot for him. By working hard and practicing. He won't be happy otherwise.

Q: He also rehearses a lot?

A: Of course. He wouldn't let me go till I get the sangathis right. If I make a mistake on take, he would ask me to do it from the beginning.

Q: Not splice it in from a point

A: These days you can do line by line, word by word. Nothing like that in those days. If they feel like splicing and joining they will decide but takes and retakes would be from the beginning.

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Q: Which other films have you worked for G Ramanathan?

A: I've sung many songs for him. Uthama Puthiran..

Q: Which song in Uthama Puthiran?

A: Kathiruppan Kannan...There was one song I sang with Seergazhi Govindarajan. That was a duet. 3 songs for Padmini one for Ragini. Totally 4 songs

for Uthama Puthiran

Q: The 'pulli vaikkiraan...'

A: Yes yes that one. Me and Seergazhi sang that

Q: A very popular song indeed. Do you remember it?

A: Not much

Recording interrupted

00:34:00

Q: Uthama puthiran is directed by T Prakash Rao isn't it?

A: Yes

Q: Him and I made a film together in 1983. He would often tell me about you and the songs. About the dance song with Ragini.

A: Yes kondaattam..

Q: Do you remember the songs from that film?

A: All I remember is Kaathiruppaan Kannan.

Q: Can you please sing a couple of lines?

A: Kaathiruppaan kamala Kannan.

00:34:48

Q: You have sung with Bhagavathar. Can you share some memories with him?

A: He would come for all the rehearsals whenever it happens. He is a very encouraging person. He would be there to motivate me and of course G

Ramanathan was there. He also would help me overcome fear.

Q: You said you would sing that song

A: Kathiruppan kamala Kannan...

Q: Where was this song recorded? Kaathiruppan kamala Kannan

A: They first recorded in one studio. Then we re-recorded it in AVM. Then third at Majestic studios. The song was recorded and okayed there.

Q: Why did they do so? were they not satisfied?

A: Something. They were not happy with the song or the recording method. They did it thrice till they got it right.

Q: You sang it thrice in three places

A: Yes

00:36:37

Q: Those times weren't easy like these days

A: Today's times has its own difficulties. But this didn't feel challenging back then. I would happily go, rehearse and record the songs. Sometimes, it would be 1 am in the morning when the recording is over. Now it won't happen as there are unions to regulate the timings.

Q: I see, night recordings used to happen

A: Yes, very much. For the film Vanchikottai Valiban, I went at 3pm in the afternoon and finished at 2 am in the morning.

Q: This was in Gemini?

A: Yes. C Ramachandra was the music director for it. I've sung 4 or 5 songs in that film.

Q: You sang with Bhagavathar and K V Mahavadevan also.

A: T R Mahalingam for Amudhavalli

Q: The film Shekhar directed for Jupiter films

A: Yes.

Q: Whom did you sing for in that film

A: M L Rajam.

Q: Tambaram Lalita was also there in that film I think

A: Yes.

Q: It is a film that wasn't a success

A: Yes. I've sang in a film Mahalingam made.

Q: Which was it?

A: Sukumar..i don't remember the name. His own film.

Q: He made many..Macha Rekai?

A: Yes Macha Rekai. Subbaraman did the music for it. There was a dance song where there was a lead vocal followed by chorus.

Q: There was one called Mohanasundaram

A: I didn't sing in that

Q: He made one called Chinna Durai

A: I sang in Macha Rekai only

Q: That is the film that started with Anjali Devi and then replaced and reshot with

S Varalakshmi. That one right?

A: Yes.

Q: He would compose himself for the films he made?

A: G Ramanathan or Subbaraman

00:38:15

Q: Mahalingam would be there while you sing?

A: Of course. He would be there throughout. He gets involved in all processes.

Q: Would he also show how to sing?

A: He wouldn't. He would be observing the process.

00:38:27

Q: Can you tell something about Subbaraman?

A: He is a very good person. Though people feel scared of him. His tunes are always unique. It would have a strong Marathi classical touch. Though we know classical music, to get those touches, one has to practise. Otherwise it is difficult.

Q: Can you tell me something about the touches? How it is different from others?

A: I can't recollect his songs immediately.

Q: He had western influences in his songs that I know

A: I can't remember his songs. I've sung so much. It used to be a unique style. All his songs. I've sung in Rani.

Q: For Jupiter?

A: Yes. Their theatre was there then. In Luz. Opposite to Nageshwara park

Q: Yes. Mangalavilas

A: Yes. We recorded there

00:39:34

Q: He said after going there, he lost his luck. It was going well and coming to this building was a bad move.

A: Is that so?

Q: Yes mangalavilas. G N Natesh's bungalow it was.

A: He had built a kottai there. We would rehearse it there then.

Q: You said you sang in the film Rani

A: Chorus that is.

Q: Yes. Do you remember the director?

A: No, I don't. Music director was Subbaraman that much I know. I know because I've sung many chorus songs for him.

Q: Who were the other chorus artistes then?

A: Sarala, Ghantasala

Q: He also used to sing?

A: Oh yes. We've sung many chorus songs then. That's how he made sing in Telugu.

Q: Who else was there? Sarala you mentioned

A: No body noticeable

Q: No one else came to limelight from chorus

A: No. there was one Sarojini. They call her udta..

Q: Udta Sarojini, I see. She is still here

A: I know. She became a house wife.

Q: Sarala is also there

A: Yes, but I don't know where she is

Q: She is in Tambaram. Retired now. She was working at Government of India Songs and Dance division. She is now producing some TV Serials I heard

A: I see

00:41:05

Q: When did you start singing in Malayalam?

A: The first one I sang in Malayalam was Nirmala

Q: When did it release?

A: 1946 I think

Q: Who made that film?

A: Sundaram

Q: It was not Balan. Balan was 1936.

A: It was his studio but there was a photographer called. P J cheriyan is Ernakulam. He had independently produced this film

Q: Who directed the film?

A: Sundaram only I think

Q: Nirmala is it?

A: Music was somebody called Warriar I think. I don't remember his full name. T K Govindarao who is now in Delhi, me and him have sung duets in that film.

Q: He would sing in Malayalam?

A: Yes he is a Malayali right. Thripoonithura was his native place

Q: His name is Rao.

A: They are the priests in that area. They know Malayalam well

Q: I thought they were Telugu speaking people

A: No their spoken language is Tulu. But being in Kerala, he knows Malayalam very well.

00:42:10

Q: Which song did you sing in Nirmala? You don't remember who acted in it? Have you seen the film?

A: I know the actors who acted in it were their children.

Q: I see it was a family production

A: Yes.

Q: Which films have you worked in Modern theatres?

A: Many. Thirumbi paar. A dance song in Manthiri kumari

Q: Manthiri kumari was also G Ramanathan

A: Yes.

Q: Which song did you sing in it?

A: I don't remember. It was a dance song. that's all I remember. Thirumbi paar is another film

Q: Yes the songs are very famous in it. Sivaji Ganesan, Krishnakumari..

A: Another film Sarvadhikari. Anjali devi..

Q: Nambiyar.

A: MGR. I've sung in that too

Q: For whom did you sing in that?

A: For Anjali Devi

00:42:59

Q: Where would those recording happen?

A: In Salem

Q: There were regular recording theatres in Salem?

A: Yes. There were.

Q: The studios would be there inside the theatre

A: Yes

Q: Would it be good?

A: Yes, very good.

Q: You said you have recorded in Salem. When you do so, where would the orchestra and musicians come from?

A: From madras only. They take from here only. Because there were no artistes in those places.

Q: Even now there aren't many.

A: They would go set up everything and ask the artists to join.

00:43:58

Q: In Malayalam you said you have worked with Yesudas's father.

A: Yes I've sung in 2 or 3 films with him. They made a film called Nalla Ponnu

Q: The one directed by T Janakiraman

A: K N K productions Koshy Kunchako. They were the producers.

Q: Do you remember who were the actors?

A: Kumari..

Q: What was his father's name? Yesudas's

A: Augustine Joseph

Q: Was he a big artiste?

A: Yes, a very popular drama actor. Very famous he was. He would act and sing. Him, Vaikkom Mani.

Q: Vaikkom Mani is Srikumaran Thambi's father in law?

A: Yes

Q: I've been to their place in Trivandrum

A: After that I got Velakkaran film. I've sang in that film. With Yesudas's father.

Q: Did he act in that film?

A: Yes, he did.

Q: He was a good artiste

A: Yes. Very good artiste

Q: Augustine joseph

A: He is no more. Great artiste

00:45:08

Q: Who used to compose music in Malayalam film you were mentioning?

A: In the beginning, V Dakshinamurthy. Before him was Devarajan master. But I've sung the most for Dakshinamurthy. I've sung for others also, Arjunan...T Raghavan..

Q: You said you've sung a lot in Malayalam. Have you heard of the composer Kalingaraman?

A: Yes. I've sung in his music.

Q: In Malayalam?

A: No in Kannada

Q: In which film have you sung?

A: I don't remember actually.

Q: But do you remember him?

A: Yes I've sung with him and have sung in his music also

Q: I've known him only in his last years. It was interesting, my meeting with him. I was going to Bangalore for a film work. He was coming from Madras. We both got the same reservation ticket. We both were given the same seat. I didn't know he was Kalingaraman. We both were fighting for the seat. The ticket collector requested us to adjust as the Railway has done some mistake. The destination was four or five hours from there. It was then we started talking. When he said

Kalingaraman, I remembered the famous song he sang.

A: He sings very well.

Q: In Mysore, in those days they used to sing a song which is like their anthem.

A: 'udhaya..kannada naadu'. So, in All India Radio station, every day in the morning they would play this song like a signature tune. That one and M S Subbulakshmi's Vande Mataram. These used to be the opening songs. When I asked him if he is the same person who sings that song, he was surprised. We spoke a lot after that. We became close friends, I've also gone to his place.

A: Very good singer he is

Q: Do you remember the films?

A: That I don't remember

00:47:21

Q: Do you remember any of the Kannada songs you sang? One or two lines?

A: I've sung a lot for Pandari Bai and for Vittalacharya. All those recordings happened in Mysore. It used to happen inside the studio. Theatres weren't there in those days. The recordings would happen from morning to evening inside the studio.

Q: You said you sang playbacks for T R Rajakumari. She also used to sing right?

A: Yes, she sings very well.

Q: Then how did you end up singing for her?

A: There was film called Gulebagavali in Ramanna direction. In that, they said she couldn't sing and made me sing for her.

Q: Do you remember the song you sang?

A: It was the song me and Lokanathan sang together

Q: Tirichy Lokanathan?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the situation for this?

A: That she is defeating the man

Q: Was the character some kind of a vamp?

A: Not a vamp. She is someone who dislikes men. And transforms later.

Q: What other films have you sung for Rajakumari?

A: I've sung in Mangapadhumai. It was a duet.

Q: Do you remember that song? Recording interrupted

00:49:15

Q: In Thangapadhumai you and T M Soundararajan sang a duet. That was for Sivaji. You sang for Rajakumari. Do you remember any lines?

A: I'll sing as far as I could recollect. "mughathil mugham.."

Q: If you remember any of the Malayalam songs you've sung, please sing a couple of lines.

A: In a film called Viyarppinte vila, me and Yesudas sang "thamaneeya keralame.."

Q: Very nice song. who composed this song?

A: I think it was Srikumaran Thambi.

Q: And the tune?

A: By V Dakshinamurthy.

Q: Which year was its release? Who all acted in it?

A: Nasir and Sathyan. Ragini..I've sung in other films under their productions,

Kutti Kuppayam.

Q: That film ran very well, isn't it?

A: There was one called Amma

00:52:40

Q: Have you sung in Merryland Subramaniam's film?

A: Yes many. Kumara Sambhavam, Kadal..That is the first film I won the Kerala State award for. The state awards began in 1969. Kumara Sambavam and Kadal parai. Both won state award.

Q: Do you remember any song from it?

A: Ujjaiyinile gayika...

Q: Beautiful song. who composed the tune for this?

A: This was by Devarajan.

Q: And lyrics?

A: By Vayalar Rama Varma

Q: He has come to the field by then

A: Yes Vayalar Rama Varma, G Devarajan. The song 'ambala kulathil kulikkaan irangi'

Q: Which film was this?

A: Odayil ninnu. Starring Sathyan and Kaviyoor Ponnamma.

Q: You sang the song for kaviyoor ponnamma?

A: Yes.

Q: Which song was this that you said became popular?

A: Ambala Kulangare...

Q: This song became popular

A: Yes, very popular. Still people want me to sing wherever I go. In Kacheris also.

Q: I see your fans still remember it well.

A: Yes

00:55:20

Q: Can you tell me something about N S Krishnan? You said you've sung in his films.

A: Yes. I love singing in his films. The encouragement and appreciation he would give..he is a perfectionist. Will wait till he gets it right

Q: He also comes for rehearsals?

A: Yes, very much. He would sit throughout. I sang a song 'ellam inba mayam...'
Recording interrupted

00:55:53

Q: In the Manamagal film, you sang a song which became a hit. Can you sing a couple of lines for me?

A: 'ellam inba mayam..' that's all I remember. If I have my book with me, I can recollect it

Q: Who composed this song? the tune?

A: Subbaraman did the music

Q: I was wondering who used this much Carnatic based tune.

A: Yes. He is very well versed in Carnatic music. I've learnt music under him for a

few years.

Q: Where did they record this? in New tone?

A: Yes New tone. There weren't many studios in those days.

00:57:08

Q: You've sung a few songs in Gemini.

A: I've been singing from Miss Malini.

Q: What song did you sing in it? 1947 it was

A: Kulikkanam...a Malayalam song I sang.

Q: You sang that?

A: Yes I did. Kulikkanam..

Q: The one where she sings, I want to be in the household of Mylapore mami..

A: Yes, the same one

Q: I didn't know you sang it. Do you remember the song?

A: No, I don't remember it well. I've sung in Avvaiyar

Q: Which song did you sing in Avvaiyar?

A: There were quite a few dance songs. The songs other than those sung by Sundarambal, I have sung.

Q: Miss Malini, do you remember that film?

A: I've seen that film. It had Pushpavalli in it

Q: Pushpavalli, Sundari Bai, Kothamangalam Subbu, that was the first film of Gemini Ganesan



ntai

A: Yes.

00:58:03

Q: He came as a young boy. Who composed music for that film?

A: M D Parthasarathy, Rajeshwara Rao. Mayavaram Venu was also there. He was the music director in Gemini.

Q: Who did this song?

A: M D Parthasarathy

Q: It had each singing one language, that was the scene, right?

A: Yes

Q: 1947. I watched it in 1959

A: After that Irumbuthirai.

00:58:38

Q: You even sang in Vanchikottai Valiban

A: Yes.

Q: C Ramachandra's music. Can you tell something about him? Famous music director

A: He is very good in teaching the songs

Q: Does he know Tamil?

A: No. He would talk in Hindi and English.

Q: What song have you sung in it?

Recording interrupted

00:59:06

Q: We were talking about Vanchikottai Valiban. You said C Ramachandra used to teach in Hindi and English as he didn't know Tamil. Does Vasam come for the rehearsals then?

A: No, he would come before the recording only. He would be around to shoot. When the song has become ok, he would come to listen to the final. Only after he comes and says ok, the song is finalized. Everyone would wait for his approval.

Q: In Vanchikottai Valiban, you've sang many songs haven't you?

A: Yes. One for Vyjayanthimala, one for Padmini, Vennilave vennilave

Q: The one where they sing on the boat?

A: Yes. 'Vennilave...'

01:00:39

Q: There is a dance competition in that film. Between Vyjayanthimala and Padmini. Veerappa would watch it and says 'sabash seriyana potti'. You sang it right?

A: Me and Jikki sang it. Only for that song alone, you know Ranjan the actor, his brother Vaidyanathan composed. Only for that song, he did the music composition. Rest of the songs C Ramachandra.

Q: It is a Carnatic based.

A: Mixed. It would alternate between Carnatic and light music.

Q: That alone was done by Vaidyanathan. Is he alive now?

A: I don't know. It's been years since we met. I am unaware of his state now.

Q: Do you remember the song?

A: Just remember the first line.

Q: You've sung a lot of songs in Vanchikottai valiban. You sang one more song in it with Vyjayanthimala, a dance song.

A: Raja Magal Roja malar..i don't remember much

01:01:56

Q: In the vennilave song..I've been thinking of asking somebody about that. I've written a book on S S Vasam for National Film Archives. It even got published. Before starting that song, you hear many sound effects like water before the song begins. Did they do it there?

A: They did it there only. They had a water tub and as I was singing they kept moving hands in the water to give that sound.

Q: They didn't record it separate?

A: No they would do the sound effect by shaking the water.

Q: And then you begin singing.

A: Yes

Q: Vasam made Irumbuthirarai. You and T M Soundararajan sang a duet in that film. For Sivaji Ganesan and Vyjayanthimala.

A: Yes. Nenjil Kudiyirukkum..S V Venkataraman music

Q: I see. You remember him?

A: Of course. I've sung in many of his songs.. in Panakkari.. Recording interrupted

01:03:50



ntai

Q: Greetings

A: Greetings.

Q: The last time we spoke, we were talking about Gemini and the songs you sang. We stopped it then. You said you had sung in films before that with B N Rao which surprised me.

A: I've sung with him in Telugu

Q: Which film was it?

A: Ardhangi.

Q: It was a comedy song. do you remember which one?

A: Only some words I remember from it.

Q: He sings well?

A: Yes

Q: You remember about him? B N Rao?

A: Yes, I do

Q: Can you share some memories?

A: When it comes to composing, everyone did it sincerely. Not like these days. If they don't get it right, they would teach patiently and get what they want.

Q: That day you said Ogirala Ramachandra direction also. You remember him? A: Yes I do. Gunasundari Katha.

Q: He used to sing? O Ramachandra Rao?

A: Yes. He used to sing and show us. He would ask us to keep singing again and again till he is happy.

01:05:22

Q: How long would rehearsals happen in those days? Let us assume 3 minutes length

A: For a song like that, a minimum of 3-4 days. For rehearsal.

Q: With the orchestra?

A: No just with the artistes. Next day one rehearsal with the orchestra. We would go for recording after that.

Q: What were the instruments used in orchestra in those days? Do you remember?

A: Mainly violin, flute, clarinet, saxophone, not much instruments were introduced then.

Q: Neither the artistes who could play them

A: Yes.

Q: They used to do rehearsals in their company offices. When you rehearse with the orchestra, how many instruments would be there?

A: There would be one with the Harmonium, Tabla, Clarinet everything would be there. There were not many instruments.

01:06:40

Q: Do you remember Emani Sankara Sastry?

A: Of course, I remember him well. He was in Gemini.

Q: Yes, he worked there. He is an expert in Veena. He also sings?

A: Yes, he does. When they were making 'Samsaram', I worked with him.



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Q: Have you sung with him in Samsaram?

A: No, I didn't. the music was by Susarla Dakshinamurthy.

Q: Somebody called Sarveshwara Rao started that film. And it was stopped in the middle as he passed away in a train accident. And then she took it up and finished. In L V Prasad direction. What song have you sung in it? It was a hit film

A: Yes, it ran very well. I've sung a lot of songs in it. I don't remember the songs though. It's been long. Then they made a film called Dasi.

Q: Charana Dasi?

A: Yes. Subbaraman did the music for it

Q: Have you sung in N T Ramarao's films? He has produced, directed, acted..

A: Yes, I have.

Q: Do you remember the films?

A: I've sung a lot. Mahamantri Timmarusu, composed by Nageshwara Rao. I've sung in that film. Jayasimha...

Q: Do you remember any songs you sang in it? You have sung in Lava Kusa also. A: Yes, I have sung in it

01:07:56

Q: You said you have sung in N T Ramarao's films. Do you remember any song that you can sing and show us?

A: I don't remember well. In Jayasimha, I remember one vaguely. I actually remember the Tamil version of that song. They had dubbed it in Tamil too. Ekaantha nilaye..composed by T V Raju.

Q: Do you remember Tatineni Chalapathi Rao? Music composer?

A: T Chalapathi Rao. Yes, I remember.

Q: Have you sung in his music?

A: Yes, I have. Don't remember the film. I sang it in my early days.

Q: I see in your early days, when you came to the field

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember any song from that?

A: No, I don't

01:09:12

Q: In Gunasundari Katha, I remember one song 'Jai thulasi..'

A: Yes 'jai thulasi..priya thulasi'. I don't remember the rest. If I have my book, it would have been easier. You seem to remember it better than me.

Q: That is maybe I am a researcher. I have to memorise a lot. Have you sung in Nagayya's music? Chittoor V Nagayya

A: Yes, I have. I think it is a Telugu film but don't remember which one.

Q: Was it Bhakta Ramadas?

A: I don't remember which one

01:10:28

Q: The yesteryear singer actor C Honappa Bhagavathar..He has made in Kannada and Tamil

A: I've sung in his films too. Have sung in 4 or 5 films. Have sung in Kannada and Tamil.

||ntai||



Q: I see which one in Tamil?

A: I don't remember which one. It was made as a bi lingual

Q: Do you remember him? Honappa Bhagavathar?

A: Yes

Q: He also sings well right

A: Yes

Q: Who composes music for his films?

A: Raja Nagendra

Q: Have you sung for Raja Nagendra?

A: Yes, I have. For many Pandari bai films like Annapurna..Santha Sakkubai

Q: All in Kannada

A: Yes

Q: They were Pandari bai's own production

A: Yes. And one more Bhakta Vijaya

Q: Do you remember any song from that? Kannada song?

A: I would remember a line or two. 'Sri chamundeshwari'

Q: Who have you sung this for?

A: For Jayanthi.

Q: Two people, right?

A: Jayanthi and Bharathi

01:12:21

Q: Where were all these recorded? In Madras?

A: Vikram studios.

Q: I see then they have not started recording in Bangalore for Kannada films?

A: No. they did it here

Q: Who directed that film? V S Ranga?

A: That was Panthulu's film

Q: T G Lingappa

A: Thangamalai Ragasiyam I've sung..

Q: I've heard he used to play a new kind of violin. Can you tell about that?

A: I know he plays veena.

Q: He also plays a violin, a unique kind.

A: I don't know about that.

Q: He played that in a film that my friend made. Music director was V Gopalan

A: Yes.

Q: He played that under his music

A: I see. Was it a viola?

Q: No not viola. I asked Gopalan what instrument was it. He said he had specially designed one like that

A: I see. Then I don't know

Q: He played it as a lead in a song for a magician long time back



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A: He was very popular in those times

01:13:48

Q: Yes. Many hit songs. The songs that you sang all this while were mostly Carnatic classical based. Have you sung any songs that are western tune based?

A: Not much. Very less I would say

Q: Is there any reason you haven't sung them?

A: No particular reason. People were not composing western style songs that's all. I sang one song though 'oridam thanile'

Q: You sang chorus for it?

A: No, I only sang it along with K V Janaki.

Q: Do you remember K V Janaki?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Is she alive?

A: No more

Q: She sang in many playbacks, in Jupiter films.

A: Yes, but not many. She sang in Velakkari, Mohini, Abhimanyu...

Q: I've heard her voice a lot in Jupiter films. Did she formally learn music or started singing playbacks?

A: She knew classical music

Q: Yes, she was in All India Radio. Must be trained formally. There was a singer called A P Komala.

A: She is alive. She was also in All India Radio then. She has sung many songs. In Thookku Thookki

01:15:17

Q: Which song in Thookku Thookki?

A: Sundari Soundari..and one Kuranthiranthu..three of us sang

Q: T M Soundararajan, A P Komala and you

A: Yes

Q: Who composed music for it?

A: G Ramanathan

Q: Udumalai Narayana Kavi wrote the lyrics

A: Yes

Q: R M Krishnaswami's. I have worked with him and he has spoken a lot about this. Do you remember R M Krishnaswamy?

A: Yes, I do

Q: Cameraman, director Producer.

A: Yes

Q: Where was this taken? In Madras?

A: Yes.

01:16:15

Q: You said there were 3 voices in Kurangil irunthu piranthavan manithan. Was there a fourth voice?

A: T M Sundaram has also sung.

Q: He is a singer and an actor also, right?

A: Yes. He has got a good voice

Q: He belongs to Madurai right?

A: Yes

Q: Do you remember him? Did he come as a singer?

A: As far as I know. He composes good tunes as well. That film, I think Naane raja.
No not that..

Recording interrupted

01:16:53

Q: We were talking about T M Sundaram. You said you sang a duet with him. The film was Kumara raja right?

A: Not duet, solo only. He has sung separately. This song I sang solo

Q: Which song was this?

A: Naan vanthu serntha idam..i've sung duet with Chandrababu in it

Q: He was the hero in it

A: Yes.

01:17:44

Q: We were talking about singing with Chittoor Nagayya. Do you remember the film?

A: Yes. Bhakta Markandeya

Q: Bhakta Markandeya was V S Ranga's film. It came out in Tamil and Telugu right?

A: Yes.

Q: Who composed music for it?

A: Viswanathan Ramamurthy

Q: Do you remember any song from Bhakta Markandeya?

A: I don't remember the words. Sung in praise of Siva

Q: Asking for a child

A: Yes.

Q: This is how Markandeya is born?

A: Yes.

Q: Nagayya was the father. Who played the mother in it?

A: Pushpavalli

Q: A very old film

A: Yes

01:18:46

Q: The music director T R Pappa, have you sung in his music direction?

A: Yes, I have. Kumara raja is his film. I have also sung in Joseph Thaliath's film

Q: Which was this film? Idhaya geetham?



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A: I think so

Q: Do you remember any song from that film, Idhaya geetham? Rajakumari had also sung many songs in it. T R Mahalingam..

A: I don't know if it was Idhaya geetham or the next film after that

Q: After that, he made a film called Mallika

A: Yes. I have sung in Mallika. I am unable to recollect the names.

Q: He made a film called Iravum pagalum with Jaishankar. That was his first film

A: I didn't sing in that

Q: You remember T R Pappa?

A: Definitely

01:19:42

Q: You said the other day about K V Mahadevan.

A: Yes

Q: You have sung many songs in his music

A: Yes, a lot

Q: Can you say something about him? I worked with him on a film. He wouldn't touch the harmonium. He would raise his finger and hum a tune. In early days also, was he like that?

A: He would do. He teaches the song very well.

Q: He plays the harmonium?

A: Yes, he plays it very well

Q: I see. He told me it's been years since he has touched the harmonium

A: In our times, he used to play it. Padikkatha methai

Q: Padikkatha methai starring Sivaji Ganesan. He has composed for that film. A very successful film.

A: Aadu pizhaithaan...vinthaiyilum periya vinthayadi..i sang these

Q: Do you remember the songs?

A: Aadi pizhaithaalum..

01:21:03

Q: You've sung in films composed by Viswanathan Ramamurthy. Can you tell something about M S Viswanathan?

A: I have sung a lot but I always think of Thanga padhumai whenever I think of him.

Q: Whom did you sing for in that film?

A: For Padmini. In engal pura nayagiye..vaai thiranthu sollamma and one more song. that song was a very long one. We recorded till 5 pm in the evening. Began at 9 am in the morning. I was very tired. But he is very particular in getting it right. Would explain the importance of the situation and asks me to give my best. I get the feeling right if the situation is explained well to me.

Q: Where did they record this song? in Madras?

A: In Revathi studio. In Mount road.

Q: Where in Mount road?

A: Behind the Kaveri super market, they had their studio



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Q: T S Rangasamy was the recordist there?

A: Yes. Before that Srinivasa Rao was there.

Q: T S Raghavan is the one who started Revathi.

A: Yes

Q: Later he built studios like Ragini, Vijaya Vauhini type

A: Yes

Q: Rangasamy had recorded you?

A: Yes, many songs

Q: Do you remember them?

A: Just a line or two 'kaayambu..'

Q: It is a popular song isn't it?

A: Yes, very popular

Q: Was this Viswanathan Ramamurthy?

A: Yes

01:23:45

Q: The director was Bhimsingh

A: Yes

Q: Do you know him well? You have sung many songs in his films

A: Yes, I have sung. He is not close but I know him well



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Q: He would come for rehearsals?

A: Yes yes. He would come, approve it and only then he goes

Q: These songs were written by Kavingnar Kannadasan, right

A: Yes.

01:24:08

Q: How was your relation with him?

A: I've sung his songs in Sivagangai seemai. He is good to work with.

Q: He is a famous writer. Can you tell something about him?

A: I can talk a lot about him.

Q: Anything specific?

A: He has a good sense of humour. He would explain things and encourage in a good way. In a light-hearted way.

Q: He would sit for the rehearsals and recording?

A: Yes, very much

Q: Not that he would go after giving the songs?

A: Not at all. He would come for rehearsals and do necessary corrections if needed.

01:24:57

Q: So, the formal way of rehearsing and recording continued during his times too

A: Yes. In those days, in all studios it used to be the same way. They won't record it without doing rehearsals. Some big songs would have week-long rehearsals.

Daily practise. But we never felt that as a burden then. We were happy doing it. Also, it helps in the song. You would have learnt it by heart and you can add emotions to it better. Without that you would always be distracted whether to focus on the words or the tune.

Q: You've sung a lot of songs. Is there any one song that you struggled a lot with? A: <inaudible> it was difficult to do that song. we took 2 days to record it.

Q: I see they recorded it in two halves?

A: Yes. It was difficult to get it right. The first day take was dropped and we did it again the second day. It was not a simple song. very difficult one. Even Prema pasam, Iru sagotharigal. Songs in those films were also tough.

01:26:29

Q: Do you remember any song from Prema Pasam? It is the Tamil version of Kismat, right?

A: Yes.

Q: You said S Rajeshwara rao composed music for Prema Pasam

A: Yes

Q: That is a film starring Savithri and Gemini Ganesan right

A: Yes

Q: Whom did you sing for?

A: Savithri.

Q: Do you remember any song from that?

A: A line or two. Muralidhare

Q: The film was expected to run well. It didn't up to the mark

A: It was average. Iru sagotharikal was made after that

Q: Have you sung in it?

A: Yes, I have

Q: Was that Rajeshwara rao music?

A: Yes

Q: Gemini Ganesan and savithri?

A: Also, Girija.

Q: That studio is not there anymore. They've shut it down and a soft drinks company has come up

A: Yes. That producer would come and sit throughout the song recording sessions. Also, for rehearsals. He was particular than other producers. He gets what he wants. He was as tough as Chakrapani.

Q: Not like producers of these days

A: People are in a hurry these days. Nobody has time to explain situation even. Busy artistes.

01:28:36

Q: You have sung a lot in Vijaya productions. Among that is Missiyamma, a popular film. Miss amma, missiyamma. They made it in Hindi also as Miss Mary. With Meena kumari. Did you sing in both languages, in Hindi also?

A: No not in Hindi. Tamil and Telugu I sang

Q: We were talking about Vijaya productions Missiyamma. You said you sang for

Savithri. If you remember a few lines, please sing for us. Who was Missiamma's music, Ghantasala?

A: No Rajeshwara rao. 'maayame..' also 'vaarayo vennilave'

Q: Do you remember the enayaalum mary matha, the Christian devotional song?

A: 'enayaalum mary matha'

Q: Who wrote the songs for Missamma? Not Kannadasan

A: No it was Thanjai Ramaiah Das.

Q: He was a regular there. Do you remember him well?

A: Yes I do

Q: He writes songs with funny words and puns

A: Yes. He would be sitting throughout recordings

01:30:57

Q: Thanjai Ramaiah Das has written songs in Amara deepam. Have you sung in it?

A: No, I haven't

Q: I don't know if you know this about Missamma. In the beginning, there was no Savithri in the film. The first heroine was Bhanumathi. N T Ramarao and Bhanumathi were the actors

A: I see. Never knew about this

Q: Bhanumathi and Chakrapani had an indifference and he torched the feet of film shot and Savithri was replaced. That was savithri's first break. She was doing small roles till then. In Samsaram you can notice her in the crowd. Bhanumathi had also told me about this. Do you know anything about this?

A: No. now only I know

Q: I have old magazine collections. About yesteryear film research. In that L V Prasad and Bhanumathi are discussing a shot. I have a still from that magazine. And Bhanumathi once told me what circumstances led to her replacement. You don't know about it?

A: No

Q: All these songs were shot with Bhanumathi earlier. You were all called and recorded only after the replacement. As Savithri can't sing.

A: I see

01:32:19

Q: Have you sung in Patala Bhairavi

A: Yes. For Malathi.

Q: Do you remember any song from that film?

A: Mahilillatha..ennathan thevayo...

Q: Ghantasala did the tune for that film

A: Yes 3 or 4 songs I sang in that film

Q: In Patala Bhairavi, there was a singer with a trembling voice. What was his name T J Varma?

A: Varma yes. He is a flutist.

Q: I see. Is he alive now?

A: No, he isn't. He plays flute.

Q: The song he sang was popular. With a trembling voice.

A: Yes. He can't see. He is blind

Q: I see. And he plays flute well?

A: Yes. He would come when orchestra rehearses

Q: I see. I didn't know he was blind

A: Yes.

01:33:53

Q: You have sung a lot for G Ramanathan

A: A lot..

Q: You mentioned Kappalottiya Thamizhan, the life of V O Chidambara Pillai. B R Panthulu made the film, right? You said you sang a Bharathiyar song in that film. "Endru thaniyum intha suthanthira dagam" if I am not wrong?

A: Yes

Q: Who performed it in the film?

A: Rukmini. The situation was 'when Sivaji is dying, he asks his wife to sing that song for him'.

Q: I see, VOC wants to die listening to this song..

A: Yes. And G Ramanathan made me cry to sing that song. To get the effect. He said he wouldn't approve it if I don't internalize the situation, cry and sing.

Q: I see. Do you remember the song?

A: Yes, a few lines. <sings> 'endru thaniyum...' I was crying throughout the recording. It is funny to think about it now, me singing in the studio, tears flowing.

But it would work only if you get the emotion right. For tears, you can use glycerin. What glycerin can you use for the throat? You have to feel it.

Q: You are right. No one would see if you had tears or not in the recording. It is the voice that matters.

A: And for happy song, you must smile and sing. That's how you can bring the effect.

01:35:31

Q: In Modern Theatres, you said you want to tell about the film Sarvathigari. M N Nambiar, M G Ramachandran, Anjali Devi. They did the main roles. M N Nambiar earned accolades for his villain role in it.

A: Echo sound was first introduced in that film. In the song, Anjali Devi is singing into the well. She sings and hears the echo from within. The effect was first used in it

Q: I see. By T R Sundaram. Was that song recorded in Salem?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was the music director? G Ramanathan?

A: No Dakshinamurthi

Q: How did they do the echo effect?

A: I don't know. I sang and then left. They used the recorded song to use the effect.

Q: They had echo studio there? How did they do it?

A: I am not aware of the process.

Q: Did they tell you there is an echo portion in the song?

A: Yes. They did

01:36:52

Q: You sang a lot for modern theatres.

A: A lot. Thirumbi paar.

Q: Yes, you mentioned. Look back with Sivaji Ganesan

A: Pandari bai, Krishnakumari

Q: Which song did you sing in it?

A: Kannalla kannalla thoongamma.

Q: Do you remember that song?

A: Not much.

Q: It is a popular song

A: Yes. Pandari bai has also sung in it..Girija..

Q: Do you remember the tune?

A: 'Kannalla...'

Q: She comes as Sivaji Ganesan's sister in the film

A: But this song is for Girija

01:37:48

Q: It was based on the life of a saint. I think Thirugnana Sambanthar. Karunanidhi had modernised it. It is a controversial film. They had many cuts in it. Would T R Sundaram come for rehearsals?

A: He won't come for rehearsals. He would come for recordings only. He would listen to it, and approve it and leave

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Q: Do you remember him?

A: Yes. He was a reserved type. Doesn't speak much

Q: K L V Vasantha was there when you went?

A: Yes, she was there. She was also like that. Would talk well but not a very socializing kind.

Q: She would come to the studio?

A: Yes. She would come for recordings. She would sit for a while and leave. They used to live inside the studio premises.

Q: Would his son come? Ramasundaram, who became a director later

A: I don't know him well..

Q: Ramasundaram was interested in music. He was fair like an Englishman.

A: I see. I don't remember well

Q: His father wouldn't let him in as he wasn't interested in his son coming to this business. Vepathur Kittu told me this. But in the end, he came to films after passing engineering. He took up the studio and directed in the name of R Sundaram. Vallavarkal, Iru vallavarkal etc.

A: I see

Q: You worked on those films?

A: No after T R Sundaram passed away, I've not been to Modern theatres at all.

01:39:45

Q: K V Mahadevan, G Ramanathan, Dakshinamurthi all these people were

regulars there

A: Also Vedha.

Q: Have you sung in Vedha's films?

A: I've sung. A couple of films.

Q: There was RMK, R M Krishnaswamy, the director. He was cameraman in Modern theatres. Shot films like Digambara swamiyar. Do you know him well?

A: I know him well. A very good man.

Q: After that he started Arunachalam films and made a film called Rajambal, a detective story. Have you sung in Rajambal?

A: Yes, I have. One song was composed by S Balachander.

Q: He was the villain in it

A: He composed one song, a duet that I sang

Q: 'Natesan's plans never fail' was his dialogue in the film.

A: Yes

Q: Do you remember the song?

A: Not the song but I remember it was in English style

Q: Do you remember the tune at least?

A: No, it was a special type of a song

Q: Which situation was it for?

A: It was between the villain and the heroine. He is calling her to the beach and she is refusing

01:40:48

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Q: I remember a dance song from that film. C R Rajakumari used to dance these cabaret kind of dances in some films. She does a dance as S Balachandar is lying on a bed. That song is taken from Naushad's Dastan. Tadak Tadak song, but I don't remember the English tune you said. I watched it in my school days. I wanted to watch it again but the print has gone unavailable.

A: I faintly remember it. It is a unique type of a tune. It is not entirely like a song, conversational like dialogues

Q: Have you sung for P K Saraswathi?

A: Yes, I have

Q: R S Manohar was the hero. In 1952 or 53. After that they made Thookku Thookki. That was a big success for him. When R M Krishnaswamy was making,

A: He also made one after Rajambal.

Q: Gumastha...Bomma Kalyanam

A: I've sung in Gumastha. That is the film with Pandari bai

01:42:29

Q: Have you sung in Bommai Kalyanam?

A: I don't remember singing in that. I sang in Gumastha for Pandari bai

Q: It is a Telugu play. They made the film in both Tamil and Telugu. Have you sung in it? Do you remember any song?

A: It's been a long while. I don't remember.

Q: Who was the composer? Usually it is G Ramanathan for R M Krishnaswamy's films

A: But Gumastha was not G Ramanathan I think

Q: Because Ramanathan and RMK are good friends from their Modern theatre days. Udumalai Naryana kavi was the writer. He told me that when they decided to make Thookku Thookki I asked Ramanathan to come to the office. Narayana Kavi had also come. You know all the songs in Thookku Thookki were popular. He wrote all the songs in one day.

A: Yes, if he writes the lyrics, it would be wonderful.

Q: He is very close to N S Krishnan

A: Not just that. He will scold you if you make a mistake while singing. It is not anger. It is more of a concern. He is a good man to interact with.

Q: You remember him well

A: Yes, I still remember his face. Slim, tall and greying hair

01:43:53

Q: You have sung many songs for Jupiter films. Do you remember Jupiter Somu and Moideen?

A: Yes, very well. But more than Moideen, Somu sir talks to all of us more. Moideen wouldn't talk much. Just a word here and there, that's all. Not like Somu sir. If he crosses you, he would not pass without talking a word or two. I know his son in law also very well. He also made a few films.

Q: Do you remember A S C swami?

A: Yes. He made a film with Vijayakumari

Q: Yes. Karpukkarasi, Thanga pathumai...can you share some memories about him? He was a good friend of mine. Recently he died in a train accident. While

alighting, he fell down.

Popular music director A M Raja.

A: Yes, I've sung in a lot of Malayalam song with him.

01:44:50

Q: He sings in Malayalam too? He knows the language?

A: He doesn't know but he has sung. He has sung with me in a film called Umma.

Q: What film is this Umma?

A: En kanavin...a duet like this

Q: A Muslim song

A: Yes. Mappila paattu.

Q: It is a popular style in that region, isn't it? Who acted in the film Umma? Muslim story?

A: Yes. I don't remember the actors but. I think Nasir was there

Q: Who directed the film?

A: Direction Kunchako

Q: Who did the music direction?

A: Baburaj

Q: He was popular right?

A: Yes. He did many films like Laila majnu, Thacholi Udayanan..

01:45:58

Q: When we met last time, you wanted to talk about the film Ramanan. Who

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directed that film?

A: I don't remember the director. Music was by K Raghavan.

Q: Who acted in it?

A: Sheela and Nasir

Q: What type of film was this?

A: It was based on a real incident

Q: Do you remember anything about the film?

A: I haven't seen the film but when I go to concerts, people ask for that songs.

Q: How long has it been since its release? I've heard it is a real story. Who wrote it do you remember?

A: Changambuzha

Q: He is a big poet in Malayalam, is it?

A: Yes. A poet. He has written it

Q: He had written it as a poem?

A: Yes, as a poem. They adapted it into a screenplay

Q: Is there any song that is taken from his poetry?

A: Me and Udhayabhanu have sung duet in it.

Q: Do you remember any song from the film?

A: Kaanana chayayil adu mekaan

01:47:28

Q: Is it some kind of folk?

A: Yes, folk style. A duet

Q: In Kerala there are many types of folk music. These Vadakkan paatu, Mappila paatu. These must have been used in films a lot, I am sure

A: Vadakkanpaattu I don't remember singing. I have sung many Mappila pattu.

Q: Other than that, have you sung any folk type of songs in Malayalam?

A: I have sung but can't recollect immediately

Q: Folk music is very popular there? Audience like it when used in films?

A: Yes.

Q: You said you sang in a film called Chilamboli. Who were the actors do you remember?

A: Ragini, Prem Nasir, Ambika

Q: Ambika is Ragini's cousin. She now lives in America. Used to act earlier. Do you remember who directed the film?

A: I don't remember

Q: Who did the music direction?

A: V Dakshinamurthy

Q: What kind of film is it? Chilamboli means is it connected to dance?

A: Dance is there, devotion is there. A married man who falls in love with a dancer.

Q: Like M K T Bhagavathar's Chintamani

A: Yes, you may say so

Q: Can you sing one song from that film?

A: Poovinu manamilla..and priya manasa...there is a small story to this song too. The producer who heard it first said he doesn't need the song for the film. He rejected it. Thikkurissi the actor said he wants the song in the film and wouldn't do it if it is removed. Because of him, the producer used the song in the film. It became so popular. Even for dance performances, this song was used a lot.

01:53:24

Q: A Bharathanatyam song

A: It is more like a Mohiniyattam song.

Q: I see. It is a popular form in Kerala. This song you just sang is heavy on classical. How is the general reception towards songs like these in Kerala? Did they accept it?

A: Yes of course. Otherwise it wouldn't be so popular. Not just music lovers, common people ask for this song everywhere.

Q: Why I ask you is there is a thing that if it is too classical, people won't take it.

A: It is all a myth. There is nothing like that. You give it in a way they like it, why won't they accept it? Look at films like Sankarabharanam

01:54:27

Q: There are some unique musical instruments in Kerala like chenda.

A: Yes. Chenda, maddalam, edakka..

Q: What is edakka?

A: It is played in temple while singing ashtapathi.

Q: I see, it is a percussion.

A: Not a big one. It is held in the hand and played. Now they don't use it much.

Quite rare.

Q: What were the common type of instruments used in Malayalam films in those days?

A: Organ, chenda, clarinate, flute, saxophone..these kind of instruments mostly. The instruments like these days were not used in those days

Q: Yes, the synthesisers, keyboards they were not invented back then

A: Yes

Q: Were there exclusive instruments for Malayalam songs?

A: Chenda is not used in all type of songs. Only in some specific types

Q: There is a film called Chenda. Have you sung in it?

A: No, I haven't

01:55:53

Q: You have sung duets with Kamukara Purushotaman. He is a popular singer in those days

A: Yes, very popular. He has sung classical and light both.

Q: Was he a vidwan?

A: He has learnt music formally. He ran a music school also. He belongs to Thiruvattaru

Q: Where is this place?

A: In Kanyakumari district.

Q: Is he still alive?

A: Yes, very much. We both do concerts frequently. Me, Purushothaman,

Udhayabhanu..we all do concerts together.

Q: How old is he now?

A: That I don't know. He is old but it won't show when he sings.

Q: One of his songs is said to be very popular.

A: Yes, in Harischandra. Aatmavidyalayame.

Q: Like Manasa sanchararae

A: Yes, in the same raagam. The words would be very apt to the situation.

Q: It seems to be a very popular song among Malayalees. Everyone tells about this song. have you sung in Harischandra?

A: I have. But don't remember. It had Kumari in it and Thikkurisi was Harischandra. He was an all in all. Writing, acting..everything

01:58:05

Q: You said you've sung a lot of Kannada songs as well. Nagendra Rao's film, Raja Nagendra music direction..

A: Vittalacharya's films. I've sung a lot.

Q: Which Nagendra Rao films have you sung?

A: Prematha Puthri.

Q: Do you remember it?

A: A bit

Q: Like a lullaby. Do you remember who sang it in the film?

A: I think Lakshmi. Don't remember well

Q: It is a popular film. It won some awards also I Think

A: Yes

Q: Have you seen those actors?

A: Yes of course

Q: Near the Vivekananda college. He has acted with me in a drama.

A: Yes, the drama rehearsals happen there.

Q: Who did the music for that? Himself?

A: He only taught us. He must be the music director

Q: Where was this recorded, do you remember? This was done in Madras only I think

A: Yes. Which studio, I don't remember. I think mount road Revathi

02:00:07

Q: Do you remember Nagendra Rao? He is a cinema veteran in Kannada

A: Know him but I am not close to him. Good human being he is

Q: Have you seen any other films he has done? He has acted in Tamil as well. In Apoorva Sagotharargal. Have you seen it?

A: I told you right, I sang a Thillana.

Q: Do you remember the words?

A: Not really

Q: Where would it come? During the dance performance scene?

A: I don't remember well

Q: He has acted in many films. Did with Jupiter films as well.

A: He has done many films. As villain too

Q: In Moondru pillaigal that was shot in Gemini

A: I've sung in that also. Moondru pillaigal.

Q: Gemini Ganesan, M K Radha

A: I don't remember who did music for that. Most probably it would be M D Parthasarathy.

Q: Must be. They shot this is Gemini only. Kannamba played the mother

A: One more actress was there..Vanaja

Q: Yes Vanaja and Saraswathi

A: I recently met Vanaja somewhere

02:01:38

Q: With K S Sethumadhavan. You said about a film aranazhikaneram.

A: There was a song in it

Q: Which one?

A: In Devarajan music me and Madhavi sang together. One for Ragini and one more Ambika.

Q: Do you remember the song?

A: I'll sing 2 lines. 'Samayama..'

Q: Sounds like a Christian song

A: It is.

Q: Was it a Christian story?

A: Yes. A very good film.

Q: It comes in a context when he dies?

A: Yes. As he is dying. By the end of the song, he dies

Q: Both the girls are his daughters?

A: No, daughter in laws

Q: I see. It is a philosophical song.

A: Like a prayer song. with all sorrows in heart, he listens to the song

Q: Who did music direction for this?

A: Devarajan did

Q: Director was Sethumadhavan

A: Yes

Q: Producer M O Joseph

A: Yes

02:03:30

Q: They made a lot of films together, Punarjanmam...have you sung in Punarjanmam?

A: I have

Q: Do you remember the song?

A: Unnikkai valaru...unnikkaal valaru...



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Q: This film ran for 100 days in madras. That was the first Malayalam film to run for 100 days in madras. It was based on a real story based on a memoir of a psychiatrist in Ceylone. Do you remember songs from that film?

A: I remember the tunes. Not the whole song

Q: This song was performed by Jayabharathi. You had sung it?

A: Yes

02:04:56

Q: Have you sung in other M O Joseph films? He has made many films

A: I've sung in Yakshi. Swarnachamaram...

Q: P Bhaskaran has written songs and film and has also directed films. Have you sung in his films?

A: Yes. Bhagya jathakam, is Laila majnu his direction? I think so..In Bhagya Jathakam, I sang a song 'Adyathe kanmani aanayi irikkanam..'

02:05:53

Q: Have you sung in Kunchako films?

A: Yes, a lot. Their studios were in Alleppey. But they used to record them here only

Q: Why? don't they have facilities there?

A: I haven't been there. I recorded for them here mostly here in Revathi.

Q: The films by Merryland Subramaniam..

A: Those were also recorded here. They had studios there but it is cheaper to do it

here. Otherwise you have to take the whole orchestra there.

Q: Only shooting used to be in Kerala, in Trivandrum

A: Yes

Q: Have you sung a lot for him?

A: Yes. I've been singing since the beginning days of the studio. I just missed the last few films.

Q: Do you remember any song? can you share something about Merryland Subramaniam?

A: He is a very good man. Like a father figure. He would not engage in unnecessary talks. Very principled man. He knows how to talk to artistes. A gentleman. I know his family also very well. All of them are like him. They still would remember old days when we meet. Mrs Subramaniam is a gem of a person.

02:07:21

Q: You were talking about Vittalachari films. He made hit films in Kannada and Telugu. In which languages have you sung for him?

A: I've sung in Kannada the most.

Q: Do you remember the names of it?

A: I don't remember well

Q: All were shot in Mysore?

A: All recordings were also done there. I would go there, stay and record. The studios would have mic and recording setup.

Q: I see there were no separate studios?

A: It didn't have then. Morning to evening the recordings would happen there.

02:08:13

Q: Do you remember Shankar Singh? Old producer?

A: Yes, I remember. He doesn't speak much.

Q: How about Vittalachari?

A: He is a very jovial person.

Q: I know his son Srinivasan very well

A: I don't know his sons that well.

Q: He has directed a couple of films. He has done many magic realistic, folklore films. He was successful in Telugu also

A: The songs were sung by PBS.

Q: PBS is a good friend. Have you sung with him?

A: I've sung many songs. But more in Malayalam. In the beginning, we both were..you know Narayana Kavi. He had come for humming for one of his songs.

Q: Which song was this?

Recording interrupted

02:09:08

Q: The Malayalam film Niranmaninja Kalpaadukal was made by M N Pisharody. That was Madhu's first film I think. Who did you sing with in that film?

A: With PBS. Solo, I don't remember much

Q: Who was the music director for that film?

A: Baburaj

Q: It is a film that ran well right?

A: It ran well. Got many awards too

Q: Have you sung any other films of his? Panimudakku?

A: No, I didn't sing in that.

Q: Mulkireedam, the one Sarada acted in?

A: No, I didn't. Some films I don't remember only. I might have sung but would have forgotten totally.

02:10:42

Q: In Kannada Nagendra rao, Vittalacharya

A: Also Pandari bai. I've sung a lot for Pandari bai's films. Santha sakkubai, Annapurna, Bhakta Vijaya, many films. Most of them were Raja Nagendra music.

Q: Very popular music director. They were brothers

A: Did very well.

Q: Did they use any special instruments?

A: As usual. Regular ones. These days there are quite a lot of them. We don't even recognize some.

02:11:22

Q: Have you done any G V Iyer films?

A: I've sung in Hamsageethe

Q: Award winning film. Which song in it?

A: It is a dance song.

Q: Do you remember the tune?

A: Even before that he had directed a Pandari bai film. I've sung in that also. I don't remember the film name

Q: Have you sung in Vamsavriksha?

A: I have sung I think

Q: Which other producers have you sung for? You mentioned three names, G V Iyer, Pandari bai, Nagendra Rao. Have you sung for Gubbi's company? B R Panthulu has made in both Tamil and Kannada. Have you sung in any of his Kannada films?

A: Yes, I have. Sathi Sakthi, Krishnadevarayar, I've sung one prayer song in Sathi Sakthi.

Q: Do you remember that song?

A: Not the whole song.

Q: Have you sung in his Tamil songs as well?

A: Mostly Kannada.

Q: Who wrote this song? Puttanna's brother

02:13:25

Q: Have you sung in any of Puttanna's films?

A: I have. But I don't remember the film

Q: Bellimoda is his first picture, Sharapanjara..I have seen almost all of his films.

A: Since I don't know Kannada, I couldn't remember the titles. When I see the film

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on TV, that is when I realise my song was there in it.

Q: He is my friend. He has shown me almost all his films. Have you sung in Rajkumar's films? The superstar

A: I've not sung in his own productions.

Q: Do you remember any film that he acted in that you sang?

A: The film he did with Pandari bai, I sang. Not the recent films.

02:14:45

Q: We talked about Telugu producers and directors. The director who comes to the mind first when I hear about Telugu film is B N Reddy.

A: B N Reddy and K B Reddy

Q: They were the top directors

A: Yes

Q: B N Reddy is a good friend of mine. I've also written a book on him. Winner of Dadasaheb Phalke award. Which film of his have you sung?

A: B N Reddy's Rajamakutam. They made it bilingual in Tamil and Telugu

Q: With N T Ramarao, Raja Sulochana. It was a folklore film. He is a social message filmmaker. Not very fond of folklore. Which song have you sung in Rajamakutam?

A: A solo I remember, when they are travelling. The duet I don't remember well.

Q: I wrote a book in 82. I saw this film about 20 times on print. I remember this song you are talking about.

A: In between the song, we have to give the sounds of 'hey hey' as if we are riding a bullock cart.

02:16:22

Q: He made a film called Pellinatti Pramanalu. He made it after quitting from Vauhini.

A: I've sung in almost all his films.

Q: There was a director called B S Reddy. Do you remember him? He wears sunglasses all the time. Studied in London..

A: I may recognize if I see him.

Q: His sister is a very famous doctor. In Purasalwakkam area. He made a film with K V Reddy called 'Pellinattu Pramanalu'.

A: Sounds familiar

Q: You see the L R Swamy Marriage hall in T Nagar. Opposite to that was a recording theatre called Jayanthi recording theatre.

A: Yes. I have sung there too

Q: They owned that place with their office. That place is gone now. That is when they made this Pellinatti Pramanalu. It was much talked about but didn't run well. Have you sung in it?

A: Maybe. Who was the music director for it?

Q: I don't know who did the music. He showed me the film. You spoke about B N Reddy. After that K V Reddy. You've sung in his Patala Bhairavi. You know him well? K V Reddy?

A: Yes, very well. He was very strict. He would explain the song word by word. I could learn a lot from him. A function was held many years back. He spoke how much he loves my singing. Many people thought I am from Andhra. My father

taught me Telugu with a teacher.

Q: I see you learnt Telugu

A: Yes. I learnt how to read and write too

02:18:19

Q: To get the pronunciation right

A: Yes. You can emote better if you know the language. My father was very particular about it.

Q: Yes, singers like Mohammed Rafi sang Telugu songs. You can't make out if it is Telugu or Hindi.

A: We should work hard towards it. When I had to sing in Tamil, I learnt Tamil. When I had to learn Telugu, I did that too. Though I don't know how to speak but I follow the language. I understand the meaning before singing. I never think to get only the tune right. I have to get the emotion right. That was my father's principle.

Q: You know B N Reddy well?

A: Not close. I know him.

Q: Yes, he doesn't talk much. A bit reserved person. He is uncomfortable around women especially

A: Even Chakrapani. Doesn't speak much. A word or two. That's all.

02:19:12

Q: What about Nagi Reddy?

A: He called me and spoke after the Seergazhi Govindarajan concert last year. I finished singing and walked in. He remembered me and called me to ask how am I doing. Very good man. I was very happy he remembered me.

Q: He is always like that.

A: You can't find such people these days. They ignore you these days knowingly.

Q: People act more behind the camera than in front of it.

A: People like him should live long

02:20:04

Q: We were talking about Telugu directors. Have you sung in C Pullaiah's films. You mentioned Lava kusa. After he fell ill, his son continued. There was a director called Jampana Chandrasekhara Rao. Have you sung in his films?

A: Yes, one of the first I sang. Menarikam. I sang a duet in it. I don't remember other songs.

Q: You said you sang in Venu's music as well

A: Yes, that's what. Rajamakutam. I sang a duet. I don't remember the tune. 4 songs I sang in that film I think.

Q: You've sung a lot for Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao.

A: A lot. Even his own film Paropakaram, Santhinivasam...

Q: In Telugu, among the Producer's list in Sunderlal Nahata, one of the major producers. Can you sing a song that you sang in his production?

A: I think the film's name is Jayam Manade.

Q: Who were the actors?

A: N T Ramarao, Anjali Devi.

Q: A social subject?

A: No, a folklore. A pathos song I sang.

Q: Have you sung for Anjali Devi?

A: A lot. Anjali Devi, Savitri, Padmini...almost all heroines

Q: Raja sulochana..

A: Yes. G Varalakshmi

Q: G Varalakshmi used to sing herself too.

A: Yes, after a point I started doing playbacks for her. I've sang for Sriranjini.

Q: For Sriranjani you sang in Gunasundari Katha.

A: Yes, that and Mahakavi Kalidasa.

Q: Mahakavi Kalidasu was directed by Kameshwara Rao?

A: Yes.

Q: What songs have you sung in it?

A: It had a dance song, a prayer song.

Q: Who did music for it?

A: Pendyala. It had more of Slokas and padyam

Q: Yes, because it is a Kalidasa subject

A: Yes.

02:23:27

Q: Do you remember any of the Padyam?

A: I don't remember the tunes. It is not done much these days. In those days they were popular.

Q: An artiste was telling me. That he is going from one floor to the other. Two film shoots are happening on both the floors. One actor is part of both. He is going from

one shoot to the other wearing the same wig. One of the crew members asked him are you going for the other shoot wearing the same wig? He replied who is going to notice. You shoot. This incident happened for real and this was told to me by Jeetendra.

A: I see. He is doing two different characters.

Q: Such is the situation now. Nobody gives those two days three days rehearsals anymore.

A: Nobody has time anymore. If we just go sing and come back, we'll forget what we just sang.

Q: Who else have you sung for in Telugu?

A: Rajeshwara rao, Pendyala, Ghantasala, Venu, T V Raju and one music director called Chinnasakti

Q: Which films of his have you sung?

A: Don't remember the films but mostly I've sung for almost everyone in the latest generation. There was one more Raju. He worked in Kannada.

02:26:12

Q: Which is the last Malayalam film you sang?

A: Last must be Guruvayur Kesavan. Me and Yesudas sang duet. And one recent film Muthassikatha. Director Priyadarsan's. He has been doing films recently. New filmmaker. That was the last.

Q: Who did you sing it for?

A: I didn't see the film. I don't know whom did I sing for.

Q: Where did they record this?

A: In AVM.

Q: Viswanathan the recordist. He is the one who does for Malayalam films. Do you remember any of the latest ones?

A: I am forgetting these songs then and there as I told you.

02:27:32

Q: Last time when we spoke, you were talking about the songs you sang. When I am looking at the Bio data I have in my hand, it looks like you have sung in Bengali films as well.

A: I have sung in one film. I don't remember the name, it has been a long while.

Q: Where did they record these songs?

A: In Bharani studios

Q: I see in Madras only. Was this made by Bengali people or done by people from here?

A: It was made by Bengalis only. But I think the film was set here. I think they had dubbed it into Bengali. I have sung the Bengali song though.

Q: Who made it, do you remember?

A: Usually for dubbing, so many people won't come. A couple of people maximum

02:28:39

Q: It looks like you have sung in Hindi too

A: But not in films. I've sung many bhajans and other songs. I've also gone to Delhi to record them.

Q: Private recordings?

A: Like devotional songs, bhajans.

Q: Can you sing one of them?

A: I don't remember

Q: At least the tune?

A: It is like Mira bhajan, Tulasidas bhajan. Since they wanted to record in Delhi, I went from here and did. I have also sung Geetopadesam

Q: For which film?

A: I think Veluthambi Dalawa. Geetopadesam in Sanskrit

Q: Do you remember it?

A: It was a long song.

Q: You and M L Vasantha Kumari sang it for the film?

A: Yes

Q: Who composed it?

A: V Dakshinamurthi

02:30:06

Q: I watched the film Velaikkari a couple of days back. I am writing a book on Jupiter pictures. I am watching old films. I saw in the cassette that you have sung some songs in it. Oridam thannile, Lali suba lali...

A: Me and T V Rukmini sang that song I think.

Q: Do you remember this Velaikkari film?

A: I remember seeing it in the studio.

Q: You said you sang in Mohini. That was a Jupiter Productions.

A: That was a dance song 'aaha iva yaaradi' by C R Subbaraman

Q: Do you remember any song from it?

A: 'aaha iva yaaradi..'

Q: Classical type

A: Yes. Like both of them are dancing like a competition

Q: I am looking for the cassette of the film

A: If you get it, please give me too. I'll also watch

Q: Do you remember the director of that film, Lanka Sathiyam?

A: Yes, I do. I've met him while working on the film. After that I didn't get an opportunity to meet him.

Q: He passed away a couple of years back

A: I see.

02:32:01

Q: Your bio data shows you've given many benefit performances in many places.

A: I've sung many fundraiser programmes. For building schools, temples, hospitals.

Q: It looks like you've done such fund raisers all over the country

A: Yes, I've done. In Andhra too

Q: Please tell us something about the awards you are conferred with

A: I don't remember what all I got

Q: You can tell about the main ones

A: You only tell about it. I don't remember

Q: In Guruvayur temple, you are given Sangeetha Narayani

A: That's for singing Narayaneeyam

Q: New York award, Ganavarshini.

A: In 1974 I went there to get it. My relations are there. I sang it in a Malayalee association.

Q: Kannadakota Tamil Sangam.

A: Yes, they only gave me this award Ganavarshini

Q: What kind of songs did you sing there?

A: Tamil and Kannada. Mostly cinema songs. A lot of people from here have settled there.

Q: Guntur, Kannur, Ambattur,

A: I got Ganamani award from Kannur. From Thyagaraja Sangeetha Sabha.

Q: Kalaratnam by Trivandrum Devaswom board. Guruvayur Sangeetha nataka trust 'bhakti gana tilakam'

A: That award is very special to me as it was given to me by the Guruvayur temple chief priest in the abode of Guruvayurappan.

Q: You've sung in Avadi congress

A: It was a programme that happened there.

Q: Sanageetha Nataka academy Government of Kerala award 83 and Films fans association, kerala state award in

A: 1969. that was my first award.

Q: Which film did you get it for?

A: Kadalpalam, Kumarasambhavam

Q: They gave you for the songs in both these films. you've won many gold medals too. 1944 you've mentioned first prize Pallavi singing competition.

A: That is the one I sang with M D Ramanathan. Even with such big judges in it, I never felt fear somehow. My father's blessings, Guruvayurappan's blessings.

02:35:24

Q: You have sung in many All India Radio stations. There is one film music direction Leela in Telugu. Which one is this?

A: Chinnari Papalu.

Q: What film is this?

A: Direction was by Savithri. It was a full women crew. Even producer.

Q: You composed the songs?

A: Yes. I had Kothandamani to work with.

Q: Have you sung too?

A: I've sung a couple of them

Q: Do you remember the songs you've composed?

A: It's been long

Q: You didn't do music direction after that?

A: Because it would affect my singing career. That's why. My father gave me a path

to walk. I don't need to take other detours. It is better to walk straight in one path.

Q: Which year was Chinnari Papulu?

A: I don't remember the year

Q: Who were the actors?

A: Jamuna I remember. Rest I can't recollect

02:36:58

Q: You've sung in about 1000 films

A: More than that. In four languages you see

Q: How many songs approximately?

A: About 4000-5000 songs maybe

Q: What is the last song you sang in films?

A: Last was Muthassikatha in Malayalam.

Q: Which year was this?

A: Last year.

Q: 1988?

A: 87 or 88

Q: Which makes it 34 years of singing career. In all languages. You have begun singing even before that

A: Yes

Recording interrupted

02:37:41



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Q: You've been singing for 42 years now. What change have you witnessed in all these years?

A: A lot of changes

Q: Can you share some?

A: The songs we used to sing long back were all classical based. Even if it was light, there was a foundation of classical in it. It had something for the singer to do in it. There was a beauty in it. The song these days are not challenging. One could easily sing it. In those days, you can't sing them that easily.

Q: One who knows how to sing, can only sing

A: Not exactly. If you are talented you can sing. You need not learn it.

Q: Please tell us about the difference in instruments used back then and now

A: There are many differences. There were no new instruments back then. Violin, flute, clarinet, trumpet, saxophone, clay violin came much later.

Q: Piano was there?

A: Yes, piano was there and organ. Now a lot of instruments have come. We don't know the names even.

Q: In Kerala, you are doing these concerts these days. More than singing in films, you sing in concerts. What kind of songs are you singing there?

A: Classical songs and people ask for old songs from films. Wherever I go, people ask for old songs only.

Q: You say there is still a liking for old songs

A: Very much. People like that more than new songs.

Q: How are the crowds for such concerts?

A: Very big crowd. Sometime you get overwhelmed by the crowd that you can't sing. In Dubai too, they specially request us to sing old songs more than new ones.

02:40:31

Q: You said you are not singing in films as much...

A: I have stopped singing in films.

Q: What are you planning to do?

A: I should be able to sing a lot. Do more classical concerts, record many devotional songs. That is my desire.

Q: What kind of devotional songs?

A: Everything. In Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam..

Q: And they will be out in cassettes?

A: Yes. I must be able to do as much as I can. That's my ambition. It will remain even after I die.

Q: Yes, songs never expire

A: Especially devotional songs. Cinema songs also may disappear. People will forget. But devotional songs will remain as long as the concept of god remains.

02:41:17

Q: Do you want to share anything else about your career?

A: If I have to say anything, it should be about my father. A man who sacrificed everything in his life and devoted all time for my musical career. You can't find another man like him. He is my everything. My inspiration. No one would know P Leela if not for him. It is his energy that has given me what I enjoy today. And

Guruvayurappan's blessings. All my teachers' blessings. I never expected I would have a life like this. If my father wasn't there, I wouldn't be here. I thank National Film Archives director Mr. P K Nair and you for coming all the way here to interview me. I am very happy you came.

Q: We are deeply indebted to you.

A: This is also a duty, I consider. I am doing my job like you are doing yours.

Q: This kind of archiving is very useful for researchers and people who would be coming from abroad to research. I would say something which may surprise you. When I went to Pune, a woman from Holland. She doesn't know English. She brought a translator from England with her. She is writing how films are made in our country. She is going to stay here and write a book on it. She would listen to all these recordings and read the interviews. So, the point is, all of this has a purpose.

A: Our life is this. What else have we done. We should at least do this. Just music. I am personally thanking you once again.

Q: Thank you very much madam

A: Greetings

02:43:44

That was the interview with the playback singer P Leela. Held at her residence in Madras during the month of June over a number of sittings. P Leela is the senior most playback singer of South Indian cinema. Who is still active but not in films. For she sings at concerts all over Kerala, Tamil Nadu and other places where her songs of yesteryears are still welcomed demanded indeed and heard with glee and nostalgic pleasure by one and all concerned. This is Randor Guy saying good bye to P Leela after the most pleasant and interesting interview over the so many days. We met at her residence and talked about her films, her songs, music and other things in general.