



National Film Archive of India

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Government of India

Interview of veteran personality in south Indian cinema R M Krishnaswamy by Randor Guy

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This is Randor Guy interviewing Mr R M Krishnaswamy. Mr Krishnaswamy is one of the senior technicians of South Indian Cinema. He is a cameraman, producer, director, and also a studio owner. This interview, the first one takes place on the morning of Saturday 27th October 1984 at his residence in Royapettah, Madras.

00:00:36

Q: Good morning sir.

A: Very good morning to you.

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Q: I must thank you for responding to our invitation to give us an interview. Your experiences, your memories as a filmmaker will be most useful to people who are researching film history. It will be beneficial for this generation and it will be preserved for the future generations also. So you can share whatever experience you had, whatever memories you have, and whatever you want to share. There will be no censoring of this interview at any stage.

A: Thank you very much for giving this sort of prominence and recognising me as one of the Senior most technicians of South India for which I am very very very grateful. You can ask me questions regarding any point you want. I may be able to answer to the fullest of my knowledge.

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Q: First of all please can you tell us your native place?

A: My Native Place. I was born in Vizagapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. I migrated here along with my father, long ago in 1932.

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Q: Where did you complete your Education?

A: I completed my matriculation in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. Then I attempted engineering in Madras, which I could not pursue.

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Q: Engineering meaning was it like B.E?

A: Those days it was called LCE. "Licentiate in Civil Engineering"

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Q: Licentiate in Civil Engineering.

A: Yes.

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Q: Ok. Now can you tell us how and when you decided to get into the world of cinema?

A: I can't call it as interest but as a necessity that I arrived here. Necessity and Interest.

00:02:25

Q: Necessity? What kind of necessity was that?

A: I was not interested in becoming a Taluka office clerk, which was the very reason I arrived here. I thought I would like to learn a profession which was new in those days.

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Q: That was 1932.

A: 1934 To be very precise. When I was interested in still photography. One of my friends taught me how to make films on POP paper and then I thought I could take that line.

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Q: It was originally more as a hobby?.

A: More as a profession. I wanted to learn so I found one Good Samaritan, namely Mr R Prakash.

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Q: The famous director?

A: Famous Director, Son of Mr R. Venkaiah - Raghupathy Venkaiah, who has been the founder of many movie houses here in South India.

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Q: Did you know Mr Raghupathi Venkaiah himself?

A: Yes, I have known him in person.

00:03:01

Q: How did you know him? Was he related to you?

A: I knew him through his son Prakash; R Prakash.

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Q: And when you first met him, what was R Prakash doing? Was he already a director?

A: He was making a documentary film for the Director of Public Health.

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Q: He was making documentaries in those days?

A: Yes, DPH office which is situated here in Teynampet. When I approached him he had a small 'hand and tank' laboratory in his house.

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Q: Film processing?

A: Film processing laboratory. He said if you are interested in joining me, I will teach you something as much as I know.

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Q: Where was this laboratory? Do you remember?

A: The laboratory was in Stringer Street, in George Town.

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Q: Near that Ho and company?

A: Afterwards, it was subsequently shifted down to Sound City, which is known as Srinivas Cinematone.

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Q: Where was this situated?

A: This was situated on Poonamallee High Road and was sponsored by Mr A Naryana. As that compound was suitable so this laboratory was shifted there. Along with the laboratory, we were also shifted there.

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Q: So you worked with him in that laboratory. I could say that you started your life as a lab technician.

A: To be very precise. Yes.

00:04:53

Q: But did he make any feature film at that time? Mr R Prakash.

A: I understand, he did some feature film, not to my knowledge, much prior to my joining him there.

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Q: When you were with him, he did not do any feature film then.

A: He did later on for which I was working as a cameraman.

00:05:13

Q: Because somebody told me that he had a studio behind Roxy.

A: That's what I am trying to tell you now. Before joining him, it seems he was running a studio by the name Star of East. That was exactly the location where Roxy Theatre is situated now. Just behind that, Purasavakkam. Because those days Roxy Theatre belonged to his father.

00:05:43

Q: It was owned by Raghupathi Venkaiah?

A: Raghupati Venkaiah owned Gaiety cinema, Roxy Cinema, and Crown cinema.

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Q: So, he was the first exhibitor.

A: He was the first exhibitor in South India. I think these dates back to 1897 or so.

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Q: On the top of Roxy Theatre, the Year 1913 more or less is etched onto the wall. Evidently, it should be built in 1913.

A: Probably.

00:06:15

Q: In 1913, I don't know whether they were showing any silent film in Roxy.

A: They were showing silent films.

00:06:19

Q: Oh, they were showing even at Roxy. Somebody told me it was also used as a Drama Theatre. Do you know anything about this?

A: I don't know about drama theatre, but it was used to be hired for these wrestling fights some time back, without interfering with any shows. But this theatre was managed by his younger son, Mr. R Chitti. He managed many theatres later. Afterwards, he was responsible for building up Odeon Cinema which was then called as Sagar cinema. And he was responsible for getting it Air conditioned. He continued there and then joined Rajkumari Talkies which was air conditioned and developed by him.

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Q: Chitti was Venkaiah's son.

A: Second son.

00:07:13

Q: Because I knew him.

A: He was a classmate of Mr Barclay. Both of them studied in the same Doveton school or something like that.

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Q: He used to come to Gopalan's office when I was working as an apprentice. But then I did not know that he was Raghupathi Venkaiah's son.

A: He was.

00:07:35

Q: That's interesting.

A : He also joined Venkaiah. As Mr Prakash showed some interest in his father's profession, Venkaiah thought as he was the owner of the theatre he could train one of his sons into this picture profession.

00:07:54

Q: Production business.

A : Profession. I understand through Mr Prakash, I am not an eyewitness to this incident. I am talking something right from what Mr Prakash told me.

00:08:08

Q: From the horse's mouth

A: Yes...He was sent to London. Barkar Motion Picture was a studio where he was asked to undergo an apprenticeship. Those days there were no schools or colleges to teach cinematography.

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Q: Like the film Institute what we have today.

A: Those days also, he was asked to be an apprentice under some western cameraman, and he undertook a six months apprenticeship course under one person, I forgot his name in Barkar Motion Pictures, London. He thought he learnt something about cinematography so he wanted to move to America, where Hollywood was bubbling with film making activities. His father refused to give him any financial help. So he made his own way and he went all the way to Hollywood by bluffing his father that he would buy a camera and bring it to India. He got some money with which he purchased a camera which was called a Williamson.

00:09:32

Q: Williamson !

A : Williamson. It was a 35-millimeter silent motion picture camera, having three lenses not connected but interchangeable. Changing lenses every time whenever you want. He purchased that camera and with that he went to Hollywood. There he could not find a good foothold so he joined what those Hollywood people called 'prop' in one of (inaudible) pictures and he joined them as a prop.

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Q: Something like an extra.

A : Extra. He got some daily wages. Then he had an opportunity to meet D.W. Griffith that's what he told me.

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Q: That's what I heard.

A: These are the words which were told to me by Mr Prakash himself. When he was in his jovial mood I used to question him. And he somehow got a foothold under D.W.Griffith as the seventh assistant.

00:10:48

Q: Seventh Assistant? That itself is a great thing to work under Griffith.

A: Seventh Assistant. And his job used to be carrying files and such things. And provide assistance to people who were above him in rank. He was given an opportunity to observe what was happening on the sets, how things are being arranged. All those things he was able to observe.

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Q: That in itself was a very great education

A: He was not allowed to touch any movie equipment at all there in Hollywood that's what he told me. He was very interested in cranking the camera at least once.

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Q: Those days they used to crank it by hand.

A: Those days they used to crank it by hand only. There was no motor operation, all was silent and he tried his level best. I understand he stayed there for 9 months.

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Q: --In Hollywood working for Griffith.

A: In Hollywood working for Griffith and other people. To maintain himself, he worked as a prop and did other works.

00:11:54

Q: He must have been a very adventurous man?

A: Expecting someday that he would get a chance. But it was not that easy for an Indian, and moreover for a very black looking Indian. So he thought he was not able to get on much. So with the existing camera Williamson, once he tried to buy some film and along with the main picture shooting he kept his camera somewhere (or on the other side). He tried to crank the camera which provoked the director and he was kicked out.

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Q: Naturally, no director would like that.

A: So, he thought he lost the chance of even entering the gates of studios. So he thought it's better to pack up and come back. He came back to Madras and then naturally he had to bluff his father that he went to America and he completed his education and here is the camera against the money that was paid. With this, he had acquired knowledge of how to make pictures, how to crank, and all sorts of those things. He was bluffing, and was not aware of the same.

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Q: I see.

A: But he had understood the rudiments of filmmaking. He had understood what you meant by processing film. Rather, his father himself was a photographer.

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Q: Mr Venkaiah?

A: Mr Venkaiah himself was a photographer who knew what film photography was.

00:13:43

Q: He was a still photographer. He had his own studio.

A: So, he asked him what do you want to do? It seems he said that you allow me to make a picture, I'll make a picture. So they planned a picture in Madura.

00:14:05

Q: Not in Madras?

A: Not in Madras. In Madura keeping Madurai Meenakshi temple as a background, they wanted to produce Meenakshi Kalyanam.

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Q: It was a mythological subject?

A: Mythological subject, for which he had another assistant who helped him in camerawork. Both of them were engaged in a number of extra artists and kept them ready with their makeup done. I believe they went on shooting for 26 days in Madurai and thereby they were satisfied that they had completed the picture very successfully. They went back to Madras and then devised a laboratory to produce a 35mm film there. In those days, there were no regular laboratories over here but this gentleman knew what was being done, and adapted in England in those days what is known as Rack and Tank development.

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Q: Rack and Tank?

A: (Rack and Tank) Development. He used to have a big dish of about 3 feet by 4 feet and

about 4 inches in depth. The developer for still photography was poured inside that. And you had another dish of fresh water and another dish to have a hypo pit. The 35 mm film used to be rolled against a rectangular wooden frame which is two and a half feet by three feet which would go into the tank. So, this was made here; and with the help of that, they developed all the film that was exposed at Madurai in Madras, which took them several days. To dry the films they had made a wooden drum. He had witnessed all of this in England. It was not out of his imagination but what he had observed there he wanted to put it into practice. He got a drum made and this film was rolled over the drum and then was allowed to dry for a time.

That's how the film is dried. After the film was dried they saw some footage, to their shock they found that the framing of the camera was so defective, that most of the people in frame were shot without their heads.

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Q: The headless show.

A: It was practically a headless show, the entire film was scrapped.

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Q: But in those days I think the negative was very cheap.

A: Yes, but the money was also very dear.

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Q: Then what did he do?

A: Then his father, that was known as Gajalakshmi productions.

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Q: Gajalakshmi productions, which was owned by R Prakash.

A: R Prakash. Then his father got a shock and asked. "Is this what you have learnt? You better show me another trial." Then he wanted to find out what actually went wrong. He took the camera to what was known as W Smith. Now there is a hotel over there.

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Q: Where is this hotel on Mount Road?

A: Mount Road. One hotel is there named Park near W. Smith.

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Q: What was W Smith?

A: That was a company and that particular area was used to be called W. Smith for many years before that it was named as W. Smith Bus Stop. It is a popular landmark on Mount Road. That was placed on a hightened path as compared to other places towards the north. So he kept his camera over there and cranked a certain amount of footage as the vehicles went round on that road. He made a test of nearly 50 feet. He wanted to find out where he went wrong. Then he got it developed and found that this entire footage was also headless.

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Q: Even that 50 feet.

A: 50 feet. Then he made a check on the camera. The camera had a viewfinder on top of the frame; it was not like a reflex model.

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Q: In those days I think they were of reflex types.

A: There were, but probably this particular camera had a separate viewfinder which is to be fixed on top which had an error - what you see in the viewfinder was not recorded on the film.

00:19:17

Q: It was different.

A: It was different. Then he realised this, and got it mended. Then he told his father about it. As his father being a photographer could understand the problem. He excused his son and said, 'look here I have no money; if you want to do anything, do it by yourself' and then left him alone.

00:19:44

Q: I see.

A : Then he caught hold of a friend in Andhra. These people originally belonged to Andhra. Raghupathi Venkaiyah - Andhra. Raghupathi Venkaiyah's brother, he was an educationist in Andhra. They are all Andhraites by birth.

00:20:05

Q: Telugu speaking?

A : Telugu speaking regular Andhraites born in Andhra. Raghupati is their "inte paeru". Inte Paeru means the surname of a person. Then he said, 'Alright I will make this'. He approached a financier named Moti Narayanan Rao.

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Q: Moti Narayanan Rao - Was he in films or just a financier?

A : Just he was a known man to his father (Venkaiah) , much more to his uncle. Now I remember his name Sarar Venkat Ratnam.

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Q: Sarar as in knight. Knight of education Sarar Venkat Ratnam.

A : Sirar Venkat Ratnam. Through him, he got acquainted with Moti Narayanan Rao who was willing to invest a maximum of 10,000 Rupees.

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Q: I suppose that was a lot of money in those days.

A : And I believe he said that this money will be paid in parts, not in one lump sum.

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Q: Instalments.

A : You will have to do it. So, again, he started a venture and made a picture by the name Gajendra Motcham.

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Q: I suppose it was a silent movie.

A : It was a silent movie Gajendra Motcham.

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Q: Where was this Gajendra Motcham made?

A : This Gajendra Motcham was made in several outdoors in Madras - sea shore, Kilpauk and other places and this picture was released. I believe when this picture was released, there was a theatre already in Madurai owned by Mr Venkaiya's daughter. I understand there was an Imperial Cinema in Madurai. I don't know if it is still existing.

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Q: Imperial Cinema?

A : Imperial Cinema. I very well remember her name. Her pet name is Gujjamma. Her theatre was there. It was released there. This theatre paid them money.

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Q: Do you remember who acted in that picture? (Gajendra Motcham)

A : There was no regular feature actor in as such. In fact, If you remember, one Mr George Stark who was an extra supplier over here. He is an Anglo Indian here and his wife was a heroine.

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Q: I know this because one of the Telugu producers married his daughter. I knew that Telugu producer.

A : He was here for a long time and that's why he used to be very chummy with Mr Prakash, and that's how we came to know him. He generally called him George but his name is George Stark. He was cast as Maha Vishnu.

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Q: I know that Stark was also an actor. I was not aware about these details. So he played Maha Vishnu?

A : Maha Vishnu and his wife played some other lady character. He chose people from different walks of life whom he knew. These people never cared for any money



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Q: There was no remuneration as such.

A : They used to carry food from their houses and they used to pay their own conveyance, act and go.

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Q: Far cry from today's situation.

A: It has existed for many years. I will come to that part later. That's how he made that picture. When he was confident that he was able to make a picture, he met one person Mr. A Narayanana, who hailed from Siva Ganga.

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Q: What was his original profession - Narayanana, one of the pioneers of cinema?

A: He was a graduate and he was not in any profession.

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Q: Somebody told me that he was an insurance agent or some such thing.

A: I don't know about that, but his first profession was a film representative.

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Q: Oh he was a Representative?

A: He was a film representative for presenting the first talkie film produced in India : "Alam Ara". He was asked to go along with the films, to check their collection and such things, and that is how he travelled all over the world.

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Q: Oh he went all over the world

A : Yes, as a representative. So, he thought he would make it as his business. When he returned back from England or some other place abroad, finishing up with Alam Ara's business; He found Mr Prakash and as a technician, he gave him a proposition that they would work together, construct and run a studio.

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Q: Oh, I see.

A : So, they thought of constructing a studio in Challapalli Zamindar's compound somewhere in Tondiarpet.

00:25:00

Q: Tondiarpet - it is far away from present day's filmmaking centre.

A: Yes that was a place that gentlemen Challapalli - the Raja of Challapalli would offer them for free. So, they wanted a vast area in which they had a sort of thatched, not thatched, actually a sort of a studio. And the reason it was there was because Mr Prakash owned a camera which was the only thing necessary for making a silent movie.

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Q: Yes, there was no sound.

A : He was included as one of the partners. A. Narayanana was one partner, Prakash was some other partner and I understand that S.Soundara Rajan had provided him some financial help later on.

00:25:52

Q: -Tamil Nadu Theatres in a later stage. But he was doing some brass vessel business something like that. That's what he used to tell me.

A: I don't know that I know as far as films are concerned.

00:26:03

Q: And what was this company called? These three people coming together and do you remember this as General Pictures?

A : It is called General Pictures Corporation. As Prakash had his own camera and he wanted to direct, they called Jiten Banarjee from Bengal, who was not at all a famous cameraman then. I believe he knew how to focus according to Prakash's words.

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Q: Prakash did not know how to focus?

A: Prakash knew this, but he needed an assistant who could do things.

00:26:47

Q: So Jiten came as an assistant?

A: He performed as Assistant to Mr Prakash, whom he trained, and made him the first cameraman. Prakash joined as director and they produced a picture, in some studio. I forget the other closer connections. Mr Y V Rao was taken as an actor. He was doing all mythological roles as Krishna, Rama and all that.

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Q: He came from the stage so probably he had that knack of acting.

A: He came from Andhra.

00:27:27

Q: He comes from Vellore, my place.

A: He is an Andhraite. His name is Varadrao - Yaragudipati Varadrao and he was also educated. So Prakash wanted to transfer his acquired knowledge to others. He was such a generous man. So he included this Y V Rao not only as an actor but also taught him Editing. He wanted some assistants and he had taken some other person, Krishnayya as a processor. He also trained him in processing. He trained Varadrao as his Editor, trained Jiten Banerjee as his cameraman and he became director and Mr Narayanan was the story writer. He was the man who was writing, supplying scripts.

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Q: So he had a flair for writing I suppose?

A: Writing - He was a graduate in those days and Mr Prakash was only a convent studied student. Prakash never had any University Degree. Even chitti didn't have any University degree, both of them had studied in this Doveton college. So, this is how that General Pictures Corporation went on. They produced a number of Silent Films and one of the films is called Laila Star of Mingerlia.

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Q: Very funny sounding name.

A: It is a Hindi name and the story is based on Arab country. So they had to use all sorts of sexy costumes. It made tremendous money for them. In those days, I believe by that time this Kohinoor film company also existed in Bombay. It was a leading company. As a boy I could not stand the girls wearing bikini, the dancers wearing only bikini and a small wrap, dancing and very fair complexioned, showing all sorts of things. Being a young man of 20 years old, I was excited, hell of a bloody trap. I suppose it is not recorded.

00:30:05

Q: This Laila - do you remember any particular artists who acted in this film or again they were picked up on the hop.

A: I just saw posters of it.

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Q: Oh you were not associated with it or is that?

A: Then I was not associated with the film world at all as that was all Silent Era. I was associated after they closed General Pictures Corporation studio in Tondiarpet.

00:30:27

Q: What was the name of that Studio? Did it have any name or any such thing?

A: That is General Pictures Corporation Studio.

00:30:33

Q: Was it the first Studio to be started in Madras?

A: I should imagine so.

00:30:36

Q: I suppose the first one.

A: No, the first Studio was "Star of East", that was Prakash studio. General Pictures Corporation Studio is after that about a couple of years later. The first studio that was started behind Roxy Cinema as Star of East.

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Q: And he made some films over there?

A: He did. He did make films.

00:31:02

Q: Then what happened after General Pictures Corporation closed down?

A : General Pictures Corporation closed down and Mr A Narayanan started an exhibitor film service. It was in Singer Street near the post office located at central station. Number 3, Singer Street Exhibitor Film Service from where he recruited P.A Muthu Swami as his first assistant.

00:31:36

Q: Ceylon Muthu Swamy. Now he is financing pictures.

A: He was, he was only a commission agent not Financing pictures. He was agent for Gundappa

00:31:51

Q: That's why he is called Ceylon Muthu Swamy.

A: He was the right-hand man of A Narayanan as far as accounts and official matters were concerned.

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Q: So he was managing his show?

A: His show. He was connected with the Exhibitor Film Service.

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Q: But they were not producing pictures?

A: They were not producing pictures then. It took some more time by that time another thing happened. S Soundararajan and Mr K Subrahmaniam had joined and started a Studio by the name of Associated Pictures Corporation.

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Q: Only these two: Soundararajan and K Subramaniam?

A: I don't know about others. Only these people were known to me. They got Raja Sandow from Bombay and with him, they made several pictures in that Associated Pictures Corporation.

00:32:48

Q: Do you remember where this Studio was situated?

A: This was also situated in the same compound as Star of East. Because already there was some sort of foundation laid over there. They made use of that place and ran the Studio there.

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Q: So again, in Purasavakkam, in Roxy.

A: No no, Paragon. This is behind Paragon.

00:33:12

Q: So, there was a studio in Triplicane-Chepauk? Because Star of India was originally in Purasawalkam.

A: This was behind Paragon. Raja Sandow was the director and there was another (inaudible).

00:33:31

Q: Can you say something about Raja Sandow ? Who was he and what brought him here. What gave him that name Sandow? Was he a South Indian or was he from Bombay?

A: He is from Pudukottai, an absolute South Indian. I was not in contact with him in earlier days. I had contact with him when he was directing films for R's Columbia Talkies. He made Vishnu Leela that was the picture which was made in MPPC which was later on called as Gemini

00:34:04

Q: Was it a silent film? Vishnu Leela?

A: It was a talkie film which was financed by PR and sons Limited.



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00:34:13

Q: Oh that's why it's called R Columbia Talkies-

A: -R Columbia Talkies, which had three-four directors, Managing Directors. One was a European. One is Mr Carmack who was the chief under whom there was another gentleman- M K Srinivasan, relative of K Subramanyam.

00:34:38

Q: He was a United India man.

A: Yes that man was the Executive Manager.

00:34:44

Q: He seems to have dabbled in many things, M K Srinivasan.

A: Yes in this picture, they spent money like water. All the possible artists who were looking to get into films, whoever approached Raja Sandow he said yes you can be there. They had booked a place called Knowhelse Hotel in that area. Now, it is called the Hamid building on Mount Road. There was a hotel by the name Knowhelse. That was the Hotel cum bar and it was supposed to be a five-star hotel. Now there is a mosque known as thousand lights. There is some open space there. In that open space, he made a Big pandal of nearly 120 feet long and he built more compartments over there. Each compartment was about 6 feet by 8 feet. They were supposed to be rooms for people who have meant to stay there. So anybody who wanted to become an artist went and met Mr Raja Sandow, and he would provide a letter and say, you go and stay there.

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Q: That was all what was needed.No camera test and all that.

A: People like Ganpat Bhat, you probably know him, you know who Ganpat Bhat is. He is a name to be very well remembered. Then Nandaram Pahalwan, Dhan Singh all these people. Serukalathur Sama and Palakkamani, all these people were staying there.

00:36:43

Q: They were all stage artists initially, Serukalathur Sama, Palakkamani.



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A : Serukalathur Sama was never a stage artist; he was only an amateur singer. He put on some vethala pakku that's all. He had very good handwriting and I believe he was a typist in the Cosmopolitan Club some years long ago. And he was brought by Mr. A Narayana. A. Narayanan, was a very conducive man. Anybody who came for a job he would never say no, very very generous. He said, "What is it that you know?" Typewriting. Very good then, you join me. Serukalathur Sama never worked as a typist; he worked as his assistant. He had very good handwriting, writing whatever he said this and all that. That's how Serukalathur Sama came into films. And because that fellow was singing. Anybody who was available in Sound City was made an artist. I will tell you about this later how everybody became an artist.

00:38:00

Q : So this associated at Paragon, they started with Subramanyam and Soundarraaj.

A : It was a studio run in proper style and made some pictures. After producing some pictures it collapsed. How this came to happen, I don't know. The only other men who know about it are, I don't think. He is no more.

00:38:18

Q : Who was he?

A : He is one Yellappa, cameraman. He was in Gemini for a long time. I have not heard about him. He was two years senior to me. He was working as an assistant cameraman in Associated pictures. That's how he got acquainted with Mr Subramanyam very well. That is as far as General pictures Corporation is concerned. After exhibitor film service, Mr Narayanan thought that this studio affair wouldn't leave him. So he thought, Mr Prakash had got a camera and by that time sound had arrived in 1934. I am talking about 1934 now. Prakash has got not only a camera but he has got the equipment which is supposed to be laboratory equipment. About three tanks and the drum and such things. What we need is only sound equipment to form a studio. That's what he thought and he was a very intelligent businessman. He went to Bombay and caught hold of one Motwani, Visharam Motwani. Visha Ram Motwani is the name.

00:39:43

Q : This is related to sound people. The same Motwani Sound people?

A : Motwani was a businessman dealing in some sound equipment. That man had one Blue Seal Sound equipment which is a variable density track, which is called a Blow

Tube Method. I don't know, except Jiva - the famous recordist and Sheshadri to some extent; else nobody would have seen it. He had one Blue Seal equipment.

00:40:31

Q: In those days it was only optical recording there was no magnetic recording.

A: Magnetic came very very late. So he offered him at a nominal price rather than initial payment and purchased it on hire-purchase. And so by purchasing it on hire-purchase model, he naturally had to absorb the personal representative of Motwani to look after his equipment. So he sent one Sindhi gentleman by the name Ishrani. So, that fellow accompanied that equipment and both of them were here. But Ishrani did not know anything about that equipment's working process. He was only a guard for that. So he wanted a recordist, Mr Narayanan approached a director named Bhavnani. He was running a studio in Bombay and he said yes, I am sending one recordist to you. He sent one of his fourth assistants, his then sound engineer was Sardar Ishwar Singh. Then there was another person, Sabani who was next to him. Next to him, there was somebody and this man by name Dwarkanath Poddar was sent here. This fellow's job was to fix a microphone on artists. That was what he was doing in Bombay. He was given some small sort of training there and dispatched to Madras. So that man came and these people had Blue Sea equipment. And that man did not know the response and other such things like Technical matters of these equipment. But the equipment appeared to be a very well-designed equipment. It had only one microphone which was known as a pressure microphone. Pressure microphone used to be a small thing but it was able to record sounds from a pretty long distance, it was very sensitive. But however, this man when it is put on the boom and microphone on set. Every time he used to say 'jor se bolo Jor se bolo' (Speak Loudly). So he made the artist from the stage, speak in a loud voice. Already these artists never knew how to speak in a low voice. They were talking only at a higher pitch at the top of their voice. K Santhanam and other people who came and acted there except one scene that was on Rao, all were on top of their voices. P.S. Srinivasrao was the first hero over there. This man went on, 'jor se bolo'. and he never knew how that soundtrack would be processed. Neither he knew nor Mr Prakash knew. Nobody knew about it. But somehow we used to dip it in the developer. There used to be a track there and afterwards, we used to print it and there used to be a positive track. And we used a projector that was already there in the studio. We used to project it and some sort of noise, sound used to appear. But much worse than what your record on ordinary tape recorders now. Very loud or very low or very loud or very low like that all sorts of things. So I, being a worker in the laboratory by that time, was promoted to be a printer. I had started doing some experiments as no literature was available.

00:44:59

Q: No manuals, nothing?

A: No manuals were available. So I found out a formula by which if the negative is- we never knew what is meant by density. This H and D curve and all were not known to us at all. That was taught to us by Kodak later. But by practice I found if this negative is of particular density and if we print it used to yield a particular density. By hit and miss methods I found certain densities of sound negatives and positives. And when I came up with output, it sounded real what it ought to sound. Then suddenly I became very great. Oh, "ticchu" that's how Mr Narayanan used to call me and my printer. So that's how every shot was individually printed and joined. Because there was no regular printing machine. Mr Prakash being a technician he had understood fundamentals of a technology. He converted the camera into a printing machine. That was a wooden box where the eyepiece is positioned. He pulled out that eyepiece and set a lightbox and where the lens was positioned, he pulled out that lens and put the film. A positive film so what happened was this distance eyepiece was adjusted. The distance of the light to the distance of the film format was focused and hence a contact print was possible. So he made two spools on the box. One carried negative, and the other carried only positive. Both of them when put together and set at the gate, closed the gate and that too with orthochromatic film. In those days it was not sensitive to red light at all so red glass was closed and now the camera had to be cranked. He cranked with hand and that's how the entire picture by the name Srinivasa Kalyanam was printed, joined, edited and screened in the crown cinema.

00:47:52

Q: Srinivasa Kalyanam was a talkie I suppose.

A: It was a talkie first produced by Srinivasa Cinetone. P.S Srinivasa Rao was Hero. R.B Lakshmidevi was the heroine and A.Narayanan directed it.

00:48:11

Q: What was Prakash's role?

A : Prakash was a Cameraman and Chief technician. So here to do all these things, that's why he did not take the-

00:48:22

Q: Where was this Srinivasa Kalyanam shot?

A : 107, Poonamallee High Road those days, now it is called Nadare Colony. Probably the next house is Singarachari's house. If you know where Singarachari's house is you may locate where Sound City was. The main entrance was in Poonamallee High Road, the rear entrance was on Flowers Road.

00:48:50

Q : It was at that Junction?

A : No, don't go that side. Not in that Junction this side...Do you know where A Ramaswamy's stayed? You may not know that place. That's where the famous A Ramaswamy was living. Mudaliyar theatre guy was living there; it was straight; it was walking across at least three perlocks. Huge place comprising about 50 mango trees. Such a big place and also a big building. There was a hall about 40 feet by 80 feet long inside.

00:49:28

Q : And the place was called Sound City.

A : It was called Srinivasa Cinetone; they renamed it as Sound City because they wanted to use this as (inaudible). Do you know (inaudible) would come like that in a triangle? That was the idea of Mr R Chitti. So he used to call it Srinivasa Kalyanam, Shrinivas Cinetone. Shrinivas is the name of A Narayanan son. And it is a Sound City Production that's how they called it. The first picture was Srinivasa Kalyanam.

00:50:05

Q : Was it successful?

A : I can't say whether it was successful or not, because it was not financed by Mr Narayanan. Every penny was borrowed from somebody, some Marwadi or some Chettiar or somebody, or some this or that.

00:50:22

Q : But he was able to repay back the loans?

A : I don't know all that mostly there are only two people who know about it one is Muthusamy and then there is L.S.ramchandra, if he is still alive.

00:50:34



ntai

Q: LS Ramchandra directed some pictures later?.

A: He directed for A Lakshman, Lakshman chettiar.

00:50:43

Q: In Srinivas Kalyanam your role was that of a printer.

A : My role afterwards from the printer, I was promoted as assistant cameraman, because Mr Prakash fell ill while starting the next picture.

00:50:59

Q: What was that film?

A : The next picture was Draupadi Kalyanam. Draupadi Vastrapaharan. Kunditob Sharandhambal was the heroine of that film.

00:51:09

Q: She was a well-known name in those days?

A: In those days she was a well-known name in the dramatic field.

00:51:14

Q: Kunditob Sarandhambal not Golden Saradhambal?

A : No, Golden Saradhambal is a different lady. This is Kunditob Sarandhambal. T.S. Santhanam was this stage artist who was the hero and Udumalai Narayanana Kavi was the song composer. The dialogue writer was P S Vadivelunayagar.

00:51:30

Q: He was also from the stage?

A : He was also from this stage and P S Peri Pulle was supposed to be a comedy artist. He was acting as Shakuni. They were the prominent names, and because a number of the artists were necessary anybody who was available was included. For instance Serukalathur Sama, a typist, was casted as Arjuna. Nobody was a typist anyhow. There was one by the name 'David Makeup Man' that fellow suddenly became (one of the cast members). A remove the beard and come, one role will be given to him. Except T S muthuswamy, L S Ramachandran and R M Krishnaswamy, everybody else has applied makeup in Sound City.

00:52:39

Q: Only you three escaped.

A: We never got this opportunity, we escaped because we had other things to do, that's how it was done. That was the period, when they did not just only used to shoot in sunlight but there was a necessity where he had borrowed money from somebody. I think there was one manager, 'Choudhary' of Crown cinema. That fellow seems to have lent some money to Mr Narayanan, against the promise that he would release the picture on a particular date. That date was not very much far. It was a question of the week or ten days so the duration was very short. P.S Srinivasa Rao was playing Krishna, Kunditob Sarandhambal as Draupadi, T.S Santhanam as Duryodhana and P S Peri Pulle as Shakuni, Serukalathur Sama as Arjuna and some Dumsingh as Bheema. All these people were always available.

00:53:48

Q: In those days what was the average time to make a film? How many months-was there any-

A: I am telling you about the film Draupadi Vastraharanam was made in 21 days.

00:54:01

Q: The entire film?

A: The entire film from the time it was commenced to the time it was screened in just 21 days. That's what I am trying to tell you now. The duration of the picture was very short. After finishing half the picture, we had another eight or ten days when he had to release the picture according to his financial commitment. So there was no time, then he went on pressing us and we had to depend upon sunlight.

00:54:33

Q: There were no artificial lights. Those electric lights?

A: There were no electrical lights at all, only sunlight . After working from morning 8 o'clock till evening up to 5 o'clock it was not sufficient. So Mr Narayanan applied pressure. Prakash had devised a method of using artificial light because he was a photographer coming from father 's profession; he caught hold of photo flood lights.

00:55:07



ntai

Q: Which were used in the still studio.

A: In the still-studios which used banker lights in the ceiling. We can fix 8 lights more than that if we didn't have the required power supply. Because the fuse was limited to some, these people did not obtain a fuse for 50 kilowatts. They have opted only for domestic fuses which go off with that load. And he has used those 6 or 8 nitro faults. In those days we used to call these nitro fault lights. He went on photographing close-ups right from 5 o'clock in the evening up to midnight 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock, he went on photographing close-ups.

00:55:54

Q: Only close-ups?

A: Only close-ups that was all, the film was also not sensitive. The film that was used was super sensitive which according to ASA speed was only 40 ASA. That film was introduced by Kodak and we had used it. So he could not make more than a close up with that light. So during sunlight, he used to shoot other shots. He somehow finished the picture and the day on which it was censored...

00:56:35

Q: You had censorship at that time?

A: We had censorship by the police commissioner. He used to come with one or two of his assistants and constables used to come. They were the censor officers and we used to have a projector in our own studio. And the film was projected for them. Nobody was allowed inside, only those people used to see and probably those people would see some few reels or something like that. And afterwards, they would be entertained in some manner and they would walk away and send the certificate through in a sealed cover through a police constable by the evening.

00:57:19

Q: So they never used to see the complete picture, only parts.

A: They were supposed to see but it never happened here, as a complete picture was not available. The picture used to start at 2:30 in Crown Cinema and I was joining the 14th reel in the lab. Because printing was such a cumbersome process as every shot of 30 feet or 40 feet had to be printed separately.

00:57:49

Q: So there was no continuous reel printing in those days?

A: No reel printing was possible in those days.

00:57:53

Q: So each shot was printed like a still?

A: Each shot by shot had to be printed then according to that one, N S Gopal, he was editor in Gemini. N S Gopal - the first editor in Gemini, rather that MPPC afterwards, he was transferred to Gemini. His brother is doing stock shots business (inaudible) Krishnan. He was editor and he used to compile all the shots by order. And two-three of us, me and Ratananu. I don't know whether he is still alive, we used to join (the frames) as there was no splicer.

00:58:40

Q: There was no splicer in those days and how was the joining done?

A: By hand.

00:58:46

Q: You had cement?

A: Film cement was there, there was no splicer available, we never saw a splicer then. We never knew the existence of a splicer. So we were asked to join (the stock) in a particular manner, cut that frame in the middle and paste. If we used a blade, it would have eaten time, we used to cut it with knife and join. Those who join quickly, he will be the champion. After joining we had to check if anything would go wrong. So we joined every reel which was then sent to the theatre while the show was in progress. In one particular song P S Srinivasa Rao and Krishna-

00:59:40

Q: Now you were telling me about R Prakash devising special lights, and in those days how was the shooting done in the interior?

A: Interior spaces were also shot with sunlight only difference was inside certain enclosure flats were constructed and painted as walls and doors and all.

01:00:01



ntai

Q: What about the ceilings? There was no ceiling?

A: There was never a ceiling but in that enclosure there used to be cloth covered so that sunlight doesn't enter directly, but it is filtered through that white cloth. But to make use of this sun throughout the day, the floor was constructed North-South wise deliberately. So that we would have the Sunrays from east for some time and from west for some time. So to divert the sun to the required place we used to engage the reflector, I mean mirrors first. The Mirrors were about two and a half feet to 3 feet each.

01:00:55

Q: Mirrors could be quite heavy?

A: And we were supposed to carry those mirrors in the directed sun to the reflector that is placed on the ground.

01:01:04

Q: Mirror on to the reflector?

A: Yes, Get the direct sunlight to the mirror which was carried like that on the shoulder, (like that).

01:01:15

Q: And Somebody used to stand all the time?

A: Yes, carrying the mirror was one of the jobs of an assistant cameraman from the camera department. These days they are called 'light boys' but those days they were called 'camera boys'. We were holding this heavy mirror always looking at the Sun and see that this reflection falls correctly on the reflector which is placed and diverted towards the artist. It is a tough job every time the sun goes on moving and the direction also changes, as it changes you have to move the mirror with reference to the reflector and see that the reflection doesn't change. If that changes you get a bloody boot kick on your ass from the cameraman. That was how indoors (shots) were made.

01:02:13

Q: Tough job to get trained in those days. Now, you were telling me about this song situation of P S Srinivasa Rao?

A: A song was recorded directly along every artist who is supposed to sing his own lines whether it is women or men. And there was an orchestra which accompanied

them. It was also on this set kept at some distance away because the whole recording was done through only one microphone. So that microphone would be adjusted to the voice and suitably the orchestra also was adjusted to the distance of the microphone. And each fellow had to carry their own instrument either on their body or by a trolley in some manner. So these people played (their music) and they sang that's how they were recording. In one particular instance the song recording was in process. At the end charanam the singer Srinivasa Rao, being a musician technically was well aware. He found that there was something wrong between the orchestra and his voice so he said cut. He said so it was a cut but while printing nobody had given any instruction that this had happened. So while printing I printed this and this 'cut' was also printed. In crown cinema during the matinee show the dancing sequence was running and all people started laughing as this 'cut' went on, in Mahabharat Draupadi vastraharan. And there was a frantic Typhon call from the theatre saying what nonsense you have sent me in print. So they dispatched me to the theatre and said you go and see what it is. Then there was a movie hall and all that. So I ran that film in the projector and found out the place where cut comes. There I marked and from there I simply cut off the place and balanced it that's all I could do. I simply removed that film from that portion and joined back.

01:04:52

Q: Another question I wanted to ask you about this studio set-up in those days. Mr B N Reddy used to tell me that in those days most studios did not have this previewing Facilities and they used to visit someplace like Star Talkies after the night show to see their rushes. How was it done earlier with A Narayanan?

A: We also did the same thing, we used to go and see in the morning hours. Those Days the present Star Talkies were called Popular Cinema. That's where Mr Dinshaw was an operator. It was a popular cinema in which Mr A Narayanan had some hold. So whenever he wanted to see rushes he used to telephone them or inform them and we used to go and see rushes. It was a very (very very very) rare thing as far as the Sound City is concerned. We never bothered there was no time and in case Mr Prakash insisted that he wanted to see some portions or something, which he thought was very important we used to wait till 2 o'clock at night. After the night show, go to some theatre, see our reels and come back.

01:06:11

Q: No Studio had this preview theatre?

A : No studio had these facilities of preview at all. Where were the Studios then, even when Mr B N knew, he knew only one studio, 'Newtone'. He never knew any other studio that is why he thought of constructing a studio by himself.

01:06:36

Q : And then what happened after this Draupadi Vastrapaharanam? Was it a successful film?

A : You don't ask me about financial success.

01:06:45

Q : Popular? Did it become popular at least?

A : People were prepared to watch and say about talking film, talking film. It was a Novelty. Whether it was successful or not financially we didn't know. But we knew one thing that we were not paid.

01:07:02

Q : You were not paid at all?

A : I had worked for one and a half years in the sound city and never received a month's salary in lump sum. I was paid whenever I wanted money. It was 2 rupees, 5 rupees, 10 rupees like that, not more than 10 rupees at a time and not less than one rupee at a time.

01:07:24

Q : Do you remember what the cost of the film negative in those days? raw stock?

A : I guess it was 35 rupees picture metre per roll. The picture roll was 35 rupees.

01:07:37

Q : And the sound probably was much less?

A : Much less, that was when you asked for TF4. We preferred that sound negative. Our recordist preferred Alfa because it is used to produce greater density and they were using positive, Kodak Positive and Kodak Negative. And in both cases in these studios Mr A Narayanan was able to command credit.

01:08:01



ntai

Q: So they were giving on credit?

A: They were giving stock on a 90 days site. They were giving that facility up to 1957 even as a producer. I enjoyed that.

01:08:20

Q: Now of course they give you limited credit but not 90 days .

A : Not limited credit. You should produce a cheque and then write the irrevocable letter and then present then get the credit. And he would wait for a week or 10 days and that is the internal arrangement they had. Occasionally they are not supposed to do that but those days there was an English manager. One Mr Palmer in Kodak then Elicort came later. Then some other German fellow was there who went away during war and afterwards, Shiroor came so all these people used to accommodate.

01:09:06

Q : Then what happened after this Draupadi vastrapaharanam? You started as an assistant cameraman in that film?

A : Yes afterwards I worked then by that time Mr Prakash was ill. So his illness continued and they started the third picture “Thookku Thookki”.

01:09:19

Q: Thookku Thookki which you made later on-

A: Yes, Because of the experience I have gained in Draupadi vastrapaharanam.

01:09:27

Q: This Thookku Thookki was folklore or was it a stage play?

A: It was a stage play, it was a very popular stage play because of its vulgarity.

01:09:36

Q: What was the vulgarity? Can you throw some light on it?

A: Vulgarity was that we had an ‘Artivilker’ scene. From that we got that popular song, ‘man born from Monkey’ I converted that which is the outcome of that artivilker scene.

01:09:54

Q: What exactly was that artivilker scene?

A: That is whatever this girl does he should imitate that was the original scene. So in those days they used to show so many things. So she had to raise her leg, raise her hand and this fellow also does and that girl also repeats and then people used to get amused. But I wanted to retain that and make it more sensible and reasonable.

01:10:29

Q: Then you made your version? In the original version, you were the cameraman.

A: It was done like that artivilker scene. We used to tie the neem leaf in the head, and he used to do it according to the instructions given.

01:10:44

Q: Who was the artist in that film?

A: C.V Panthulu was the hero and K T Rukmani was the heroine and, one more Devaki a Malayalam girl who played the heroine's sister Ragini portion. and one-

01:11:05

Q: Where was this made? same Sound City? Sound city Production.

A: Sound city Production. Entire film was written along with dialogue, songs and everything by Udumalai Narayanana Kavi.

01:11:16

Q: So he was something like a regular writer for Narayanan?.

A: Yes, the complete script was done by him.

01:11:22

Q: And who directed this picture?

A: Directed by Mr R Prakash.

01:11:26

Q: So R Prakash was alright by that time?



ntai

A : No no... He was ill, that's why I became a cameraman or else I would have not become a cameraman so easily.

01:11:32

Q: But how did he direct if he was ill?

A: He was sitting on a chair.

01:11:35

Q: Oh He was able to move around?

A : Rheumatic pains - His knee and all got swelled. Rheumatic swelling. So he would give instruction as to keep the camera there, do like this and all.

01:11:47

Q: So he used to sit on this set and tell you how to do it?

A : How to do and then I used to carry out. That's how I became both, that I became a cameraman.

01:11:53

Q: So that was your first independent venture, Thookku Thookki?

A: Yes.

01:11:58

Q: When was this Thookku Thookki done?

A: That was produced in 1934, sometime in September or October.

01:12:05

Q: How long did this film take?

A: That was a film produced for a producer; it is not A Narayanana's own film. Because it was produced for one Shakuntala Films.

01:12:17

Q: Shakuntala films? Who were those people?

A: Which was owned by R K Kanthaswamy, Shangu Chettiar's brother and some other partners from Coimbatore. Subsequent to that they produced other pictures also 'Rajambal' - first version of Rajambal.

01:12:40

Q: Second version you made in the fifties?

A: I made in the fifties.

01:12:43

Q: That was how you were drawn to these subjects?

A: Yes because I knew these subjects from those days I thought I could improve on them as a director. I thought I could use my knowledge on that and produce.

01:12:59

Q: This 'Thookku Thookki' who wrote it? Do you know who wrote the play?

A: I think it is Shankar Lingappa Swamy or somebody.

01:13:06

Q: Shankardas Swamy. Was it his play?

A: I think it is his but it was very very popular on stage. I understand K B Sundarambal and Kitappa played Thookku Thookki.

01:13:20

Q: How was this film version of R Prakash received by the public? Was it well-received?

A: Yes it was well-received they made a profit on that.

01:13:31

Q: Who was the music director for all these films? For Narayanan's films?

A: For Narayanan films, I don't know about- first Srinivasa Kalyanam, and Music Director was done jointly by P S Srinivasan Rao and M D Parasadhi.

01:13:48

Q: P S Sreenivasa Rao had a training in music.

A: He is a good musician by - learnt M D Parasadhi also is a systematic musician. So both of these people joined together to compose music for Srinivasa Kalyanam. For Draupadi Vastrapaharanam the music director was Gynanamani. And Thookku Thookki also to a great extent all the tunes were composed by Udumalai Narayanana Kavi himself.

01:14:20

Q: He was able to compose tunes also?

A: Yes yes all his tunes even Draupadi vastrapaharanam. He was able to give them tunes and, there was one Rangaswamy, some harmonist and that fellow used to say we will tune this. That's how they did it.

01:14:40

Q: And where were these music sessions done? Studio itself or did they have a separate office for it?

A: No Studio... office... Everything was in the studio during working hours. There were no special working hours. There was no conveyance and all that. The entire Studio had only one car that was one beauraunt owned by Mr A Narayanan. The car was sent to only one of his artists R B Lakshmi Devi, who was supposed to be coming from a society - a big society. Shanmugam - Mookpulli Shanmugam.

01:15:18

Q: Staff people - He is from the crew business. She was from the crew it seems?

A: She was the daughter of that guy. They were supposed to be not working for money just for hobby sake. And she was a sort of lady who was interested in doing all these sorts of things. So she was the only one who was picked up by car and dropped by car.

01:15:37

Q: So for others, no vehicles were sent like that they do now for everybody

A: No, everybody had to make their own arrangement of their conveyance. They come by chetka, walk, crawl or do anything and reach there.

01:15:51

Q: So that system was invoked at that time? And nobody complained?

A: Yes, that was the system. Even technicians, even Mr Prakash used to make his own arrangement to come to the studio.

01:16:04

Q: And nobody wanted a conveyance from the producer reimburse for a vehicle as they do today.

A: No, nobody wanted food from the producer, they were making arrangements of food for themselves.

01:16:14

Q: There was no supply of food and things like that, no production boys hanging around.

A: Nothing, if they want to drink water they have to go back where the tap was fitted, drink water and come back, everybody. It was not strict, that was all available and that was what they were used to doing. See these people came from the stage, the stage was paying them so meagrely. And when they came here they thought they were more popular. This was enhancing their name on the stage that he is a film artist. Film Actress K. T. Rukmani means drama theatre used to full. Since they all were coming on the screen they got popularised. Not for kalai and all it all humbuk. This very word kalai was introduced by the Greatman - Kalaingan. Before that, we were used to call it as Kuthadi only not as an artist just like that. We did not even know one word like that in Tamil as Kalaingan only after it was introduced by Dr. Karunanidhi. Before that, it was not like that.

01:17:41

Q: Credit goes to him for lifting the social status?

A: Because of him only our status got improved.

01:17:48

Q: What film did you do after Thookku Thookki?

A: Gnyanasundari came before Thookku Thookki.



ntai

01:17:56

Q: That was the first version?

A: That was the first version produced by some other producer. I don't remember him very well, for which Raja Chandrasekhar was director. Raja Chandrashekhar is Raghunath's elder brother and he was the director. Before that he was working in Bombay along with Bhawnani and other people.

01:18:15

Q: So he had training in Bombay?

A: Yes yes though he was a South Indian he had acquaintance with these people. He was not trained here he was trained in Bombay. He started his film career with Bhavnani in film Centre Bombay you know there was a film centre in Bombay where cameramen like sarpotdar and other people. Faisal bhai - M A Faisal bhai and all that, so there he joined them as an art director as he was an artist also. He used to paint. I have seen him draw sketches and paintings. He got his directorial training under P Y Altekar. He is a Maharashtrian, the man who directed Sambandh Mudaliar's Manohar.

01:19:19

Q: This was made in Pune it seems. Pune, Kolhapur.

A: Bombay Film Centre.

01:19:23

Q: When was that? Do you remember this? Sambandh Mudaliar's Manohar. Was it a silent or a talkie?

A: It was a talkie for which we repaired.

01:19:30

Q: What do you mean by when you say repaired?

A: Because they found that it was very very slow and their movements were very slow. The drama by Sambandh Mudaliar you know came from the street shot at 100 feet distance. What is this man? This is much slower. And then Meenakshi sound studio was in progress, the present Satya which was owned by C V Raman then. It was a limited concern in which Prakash was also working. By that time he had a difference



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of opinion with Mr A Narayanan so he joined Narayanan's other brother. Because I was trained by him as a Chela so I went along with him.

01:20:19

Q: So you left A Narayanan and went over to Meenakshi Cinetone?

A: Cinetone along with Mr Prakash.

01:20:24

Q: When was this? Approximately.

A: That was during Tara Sasankam.

01:20:32

Q: In the middle 1936-35. Who made Tara Sasankam?

A: First Tara Sasankam was made by A Narayanan.

01:20:40

Q: When was that made?

A: That was in 1930 each picture took one month or two months time.

01:20:46

Q: So you were involved in the making of Tara Sasankam also?

A: Tara Sasankam, I was not completely involved in that, but I was involved in another Tara Sasankam in which Krishnapalli acted.

01:20:57

Q: In this Narayanan's Tara Sasankamh who were the artists?

A: Raja Sundari, mother of Rajeshwari.

01:21:06

Q: Was she a popular heroine then? Raja Sundari.

A: I can't say whether she was popular, she was believed to act whatever they say.



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01:21:15

Q : That Tara Sasankam was supposed to be a very sexy kind of story. Some dating scenes and all that.

A : It is not. there was nothing wrong in the story at all. There was only one scene which is called the oil bath scene. That is she tries to entice Shashanka and that man is not very easily available. So she thinks he should be seduced and calls that man for applying oil in his head and removes her saree to tempt him. On the stage disrobing of the saree they were showing something like easily perceptible skin tone inners as there were no skirts available at that time. And suddenly the light will be shut off and everyone will be shouting for that. The same scene was produced here by Narayanan for which we adopted a double.

01:22:25

Q : Oh for that particular sequence this Raja Sundari did not do it?

A : He never wanted her to do it because we appointed a double who happened to be Jiten's wife.

01:22:38

Q : Do you remember her name?

A : Her Name is Rajeswari. She is no more. Wife of a Sub-inspector.

01:22:45

Q : And then you left in the middle of 'Tara Sasankam'.

A : Tara Sasankam - in the middle Prakash had some trouble and he left. So my position was hot and so I too left. Both of us first joined Meenakshi Cinetone where Mr C V Raman produced Lanka Dahan.

01:23:03

Q : Who is this C V Raman?

A : C V Raman is the elder brother of A Narayanan.

01:23:06



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Q: What was he doing prior to coming into films? He was a lawyer I heard.

A: He had the degree of B.A. LLB. I have never seen him practising law. I have never seen him even draft a proper agreement. He was a lawyer and he was a B.A. LLB alright. You know this LLB was too good. LLB was taught in Pune, not in Madras. So people who could not get their degrees here were going there. That was the merit they got so he came here. Because he is a person who comes from Shiva Ganga he caught hold of one Kashi Chettair. I don't remember the face but it was Kashi Chettair who was the Financier. He started Lalitha Cinetone initially, as he was a lawyer everything was of limited concern to reduce liability. This was his job. Lalitha Cinetone ltd, then after that he formed National Theatre ltd, then Meenakshi Cinetone ltd, everything Limited concern.

01:24:21

Q: And where was Lalitha Cinetone operating?

A: All those things were in the same Sathya Studio compound. The entire compound now ranging from Jupiter office on one side is that Music Academy Brodicasi that was the one side, the other side is this main road, another side is the Adyar Bridge, Other Side is water leading to (inaudible). Entire compound with the existing building was taken on rent for 150 Rupees from Arkad Nawab.

01:25:11

Q: That belonged to Arkad Nawab? That entire place and entire place was on rent for 150 Rs a month. Sounds almost incredible today.

A: Yes, We are talking about days which are 50 years back from now. Then you are aware about the cost of rupee. But the same thing was transferred: Lalita Cinetone did not exist for long; it was converted into National theatres Limited. National Theatres also did not flourish well.

01:25:40

Q: Did he produce any pictures under these banners? Only the name was there?

A: Only names... made attempts. Then under Meenakshi film Cinetone Limited he produced a picture. First, he caught hold of Kashi Chettiar then he started in this aranganayagam - One Ravanagovinda Swamy, you may not have heard his name. After seeing him we will not accept that this person belongs to the film industry. He was having a huge belly and he used to tie 10 gajam tape around his waist. His name itself was Ravana Govinda Swamy so he is Ravana and Hanuman Sarangabani, he was

Hanuman in the film titled 'Lankadahan'. The Direction was done by R. Prakash, I was the Cameraman and C.V. Raman was the Producer. Heroine, I think she is alive till now. Gnyanaamba - M.K. Radha's first wife, she is no more. She was not a Hindu, She was a Muslim lady. She acted in 'Sathi Leelavathi' in which M K Radha also acted then probably they had some understanding they lived together. So she was brought here and she was made to act for Sita's portion.

01:27:35

Q: Oh Gnyanaamba played Sita.

A : Sita in Lankadahan. And Rama and Lakshman's roles were given for so many people. I do not remember them at all.

01:27:53

Q: Hanuman was this huge man. Who played Hanuman?

A: Sarangapani - Anjineyar Sarangapani, Ravana played by Govinda Swamy.

01:28:01

Q: How did he do this? Setting fire to Lanka sequences and all those fire scenes.

A: Fire scenes, we made a miniature.

01:28:10

Q: No sets were burnt in those scenes?

A : We made a miniature and we could not adopt as the latest miniature should be captured at a faster speed. But our cameras never ran faster than that, so miniatures looked like miniatures. That is what it was possible.

01:28:31

Q: Technique was so primitive in those days.

A: And he tried to compensate in printing but whatever he did it was not looking like a miniature which was on the set. But we made Hanuman fly over that and underneath him there was a city burning. His tail was burning with fire-

01:28:53

Q: You did some double printing, was it possible at that time? No optical printer then?

A: Double Exposure he was an expert in that.

01:29:00

Q: In camera? Inside the.. In the camera he used to do double exposure. There was no optical printer in those days?

A: There was nothing available but he was able to expose not only double he used to make five exposures on that. He made five Krishnas appear in five different places.

01:29:14

Q: In which film was this? Krishna Leela or some- Did he make any Krishna Leela film?

A: It was in the same film Draupadi vastrapaharanam.

01:29:23

Q: Oh Draupadi? Five Krishna's appeared in a single frame? And he did it in the camera?

A: He did it in the camera with Sunlight.

01:29:29

Q: With Sunlight? It was quite creditable in those days.

A: And he made up beeda (betel leaves preparation). In the Thookku Thookki film a man's face used to appear inside the beeda.

01:29:46

Q: The man's face can be seen in-

01:29:49

Q: Before you were telling me about Mr R Prakash. He was a director who trained you. Can you tell me something about the nature of the equipment they had ? For instance the lenses. How many lenses did you fix in the camera in those days?

A: There was only one lens in the camera that we possessed then. But Mr prakash knew how to make use of that one lens.

01:30:14

Q: What was that lens? What was the...

A: It was a 50 mm lens.

01:30:19

Q: 50 mm lens! That is the only lens?

A: The only lens available but he could make use of it in several ways by adapting. He understood what is meant by focal length. When he wanted to shoot a close-up he was making a cardboard adapted to that lens and introduced that cardboard adaptor into this camera. And join that adaptor to this lens so that it was able to give him close-up.

01:30:48

Q: Yeah otherwise in 50 you can't take a close-up.

A: It is not that we cannot take a close-up but we have got to move very near. And whereas the soundman will oppose the camera noise so you move back. So that was how he was improvising. Technically he was very sound I should say now because those days we never happened. We couldn't get any bulletins or books or anything. He converted the same camera into a film printer.

01:31:17

Q: Yes you told me just a little while ago how it was done?

A: Likewise he converted everything and made it possible.

01:31:24

Q: He was a great innovator?

A: That's how he was taken as a chief technician and he was able to provide every facility that was possible. That was necessary for filmmaking except sound recording.

01:31:36

Q: I see. He did know much about that?

A: He never bothered about it. He never knew about it.

01:31:42

Q: Being a silent movie man he didn't know much about sound. Rather he didn't bother to know.

A: But he edited it.

01:31:48

Q: I see, So he knew Editing also?

A: He used to edit without a movie hall. He was able to read modulation and then he knew where to cut. Wherever the modulation ends he used to cut.

01:32:00

Q: By looking at the track.

A: By looking at the track. He could identify the music track and dialogue track.

01:32:07

Q: By looking at the modulation.

A: By looking at the modulation.

01:32:10

Q: How was the editing done in those days without a movie hall? How were they doing it?

A: Only thing there is a man who sees the film. To view the film there was nothing except a magnifying glass - ordinary magnifying glass.

01:32:22

Q: Not even a viewer?

A: Not even a viewer and he used to make a mark and give it to the editor who is supposed to be Gopal. He was his assistant who used to make a corresponding mark to the sound. And he was putting- there was only synchronometre.

01:32:39

Q: So you had a synchronometre in those days?

A: We had only two-way synchro metre.

01:32:43

Q: Two-way. I see ...

A : Two way that were existing in those days. Probably a four-way were available elsewhere but the place in which I worked, there was only a two-way synchronometre available. There was one two-way sync chronometre and there was one inter rewinder in which there was a footage counter coupled with a sprocket which we were using for synchronisation. That is lay one film over the other and roll it on the same sprocket so that it is synchronised.

01:33:17

Q: So editing was a very slow process then what it is today it should have been. I mean the movie hall process is very fast. How long did it take for editing?

A : But people were working for a number of hours. Today's shooting was - suppose a scene was shot this morning. By evening the scene is complete. We were able to see the rush at 2 O'clock at night.

01:33:38

Q: I see - so fast it was?

A: It was - because people were willing to work harder.

01:33:42

Q : Work harder than they do today. And what about the camera movement, the number of shots, what was the technique. Was it like very lengthy takes like stage. Or were they three point cuts.

A : There were lengthy takes when songs were shot because there was no other way. They had to go through this song at one stretch for which they only implemented a trolley.

01:34:07

Q: Nothing else?

A : Nothing else. They were mounting the camera on a trolley. Go forward, track backwards or go round and go zigzag and all that. Except that there was no movement

01:34:18

Q: Did you have these tracks in those days? For Trolley were there any tracks?

A: Tracks were there. That is if the ground was smooth there was no need for the track because for trolleys they were using inflated tyres so that there was not much of a bump and jumps and even if there was a little it was not. They didn't mind about it.

01:34:42

Q: Now coming back to this Meenakshi cinetone what was the first film you did after you came over here? Was it after Lankadahanam?

A: After Lankadahanam I was sent to Calcutta to edit that film.

01:34:54

Q: LankaDahanam was edited in Calcutta? not here?

A: Yes. It was not here because by that time there was a rub between Mr Satap Chettair and Mr C V Raman.

01:35:04

Q: Who was Satap Chettair? The owner of the property?

A: Satap Chettair was the financier for the film.

01:35:09

Q: He is the man who built a mill and a house on Sant Road. Is he the same Chettiar?

A: He was the owner of then Somasundaram Mills Coimbatore, Managing director of Kaleeswarar Mills then Proprietor of Chellam Talkies, Pollachi.

01:35:25

Q: I knew him. I knew his son.

A: He had no son. He adopted Somasundaram.

01:35:31

Q: I knew Somasundaram

A: He has a house in Santhome.

01:35:35

Q: Where a lot of shooting used to go on.

A: He was interested in films because he had an interest in cinema, and drama artists Ratna Bai and Saraswati Bai.

01:35:45

Q: Oh I see he was friendly with them?

A: He was actually maintaining them. Because of them he had to enter films.

01:35:55

Q: That is how he got into films. And he was the man who owned this Meenakshi Cinetone property?

A: Meenakshi Cinetone did not have any property. They were paying rent.

01:36:03

Q: Then what was Satap Chettair's interest in it?

A: Satap Chettair was financing for the film that was -

01:36:07

Q: Oh he was the financier?

A: Financier that's all he had no other hold. Afterwards when this man had left he became the occupier.

01:36:19

Q: Who? Satap Chettiar..

A: Satap Chettair became the occupier.



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01:36:22

Q: After C V Raman left?

A: After C V Raman left. He got the studio floor constructed. The first floor constructed was by him.

01:36:30

Q: By that time this film must have got completed? This second film you started?

A : 'LankaDahanam' was completed, it was released and afterwards he went to Calcutta with these bai - sisters produced Bama Vijayam with Maharaja Paramkrishnamurthy. He came back after that. He made a contract with A. Narayanan to produce two films one was Kabir Das Immanuel club Kabir Das.

01:37:00

Q: Immanuel club was probably a stage unit?

A: P.D.V. Krishnan was the hero and then Subbaya Chettair and Baiya Chettair were comedians. They all were in one group. This Immanuel group was very popular on stage. They played that Kabir das drama on stage. And it was Satap Chettair's plan to make that drama into a film and engage them. A. Narayanan was the director.

01:37:34

Q: He was the director?

A: Director, for which A. Narayanan had to supply sound equipment and camera on contract. In the contract, film was going on. The sound equipment and camera A Narayanan possessed was belonged to, rather the camera belonged to Mr Prakash which he never minded, he kept quiet. Sound equipment was A Narayanan's, we used to come from Purasawalkam every day to this place.

01:38:09

Q: To Adyar?

A: Place of shooting is Adyar.

01:38:12



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Q: What was the mode of transport?

A: Sets were constructed here, there was only one sound van. 01:38:17

Q: Only one van.

A: In which sound equipment, camera and all that was used to be transported. All the rest of the people should reach the place where the shooting was planned.

01:38:26

Q: But were there any buses going to Adyar in those days?

A: Buses were plying up to Luz.

01:38:31

Q: Also there was some Tram service up to luz.

A: There was a Tram service but the bus also was going till Luz. From that point we used to walk.

01:38:38

Q: From Luz to Adyar everybody had to walk? Men and women everybody?

A: Yes yes... everybody.

01:38:41

Q: There were no chetkas available?

A: Chetkas were available, some people used to go by chetkas and we used to walk. As far as I am concerned I used to walk.

01:38:50

Q: I see...then what happened that Immanuel clubs 'Kabir Das' was going on.

A: Going on - in the middle of the picture - I'll tell you some technical matters.

01:39:04

Q: Please go ahead.

A: This camera and sound are to be synchronised. There was a silent camera and there was a sound running at a speed with a motor. The silent camera never had a motor.

01:39:21

Q: It was hand-cranked. Was it?

A: This was hand-cranked so they had to adapt it to the motor. They got a motor for that and it was mounted. It was not possible to mount the motor on the camera. Every hand camera you have two gears. That is while cranking with your hand if you make one turn it will make 8 frames. This sprocket had 32 teeth and it will give you eight frames. Likewise, it used to have another gear if you turn one turn it will make one frame.

01:40:03

Q: Oh like a single frame exposure?

A: Single frame exposure, that provision used to be available in all silent cameras. So these people, there was one engineer Bhupathi Nayak. He was the man who made the first sound equipment in India. Bhupathi sound system, he was the principal of School of Technology which was running in Broadway, under whom so many other people studied. That man gave an idea and they had introduced a flexible drive. That is there was a rubber tube as you have a motor car speedometer cable. There was an outer cable and there was an inner cable. That inner cable was shunted into this one frame turning gear and the outer cable is shunted to the motor. And when the sound Motor started this also used to start, all simultaneously.

01:41:07

Q: Like an interlock?

A: That is what is known as interlock and that's how it was running. During the middle of the picture, that interlocking should have been done carefully. There should be shunt and all those things now, I seem to understand but then I never knew all that. That fellow in a hurry switched on and damn that thing broke; the shaft, main shaft of the camera broke. So there were people who could have repaired it. If some time was given this Bhupati or people would have repaired it. But that Satap Chettair being a rich man he was by nature was a very impetuous man and he wanted things to be done immediately

01:41:59



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Q: Instant Service?

A: That was his nature, so he said the camera can't function what to do now? There is no camera over here then what shall we do. He made a Trunk call to the film centre in Bombay. M. A Faisal 'Bhai' was their only agent who was selling cameras. They said they have the only camera available Ivory Super Paro. If they want, they can supply you that camera or else they have to wait for 6 months to import and supply any other camera. But these people wanted it immediately because by then Ramnath was supporting (inaudible) cameras from Raag Jyoti studios.

01:42:47

Q: K Ramnath.

A: K Ramnath - We can't see through this camera. We want that same camera and asked about the price of the camera.

01:43:05

Q: What was the Price of the camera, Rs. 14500?

A: 14500 rupees. Without understanding the details over the telephone, he said, alright here is the draft which is being sent you. Send the camera along with the operator. To demonstrate that camera this Sundar M Nadkarni came.

01:43:37

Q: I see Sundar Rao Nadkarni.

A: This man's job in the film Centre was one of the camera assistants.

01:43:44

Q: He was not an editor?

A: He was never an editor. He did some editing in his grandfather's Surya Film Company. I will tell you about his editing separately, not on this platform.

01:43:59

Q: So he started as a demonstrator?

A : He came here to demonstrate and see that the camera is working and going well. That was the purpose for his visit. He brought the camera and by (inaudible). The camera which they had been seeing rather than the camera that they have been hearing earlier. They used to hear a camera running from a long distance. But this camera was so silent. So he kept on asking is the Camera running?

01:44:38

Q: It was so silent?

A : Absolutely silent then, he showed the pointer of that metre. This way and all that then he put somebody, Ratnabai on the makeup, photo he shot for the film. And the output was first class. He retained the cameraman as well as the camera which he brought here.

01:44:58

Q: Sundar Rao Nadkarni was also retained?

A : Retained thereby I lost my job.

01:45:05

Q: Oh. So he became the cameraman?

A : Then what will I do? He became the cameraman and he continued. Then he became a cameraman and he started dictating terms. Mr A Narayanan did not like it much as he was also a very independent natured man. He never bothered about his money and he said. 'look here if you want you can keep this man, you complete this picture and go to hell you don't call me'.

01:45:37

Q: He said this to Chettiar?

A : And he savoured connections but he lent his sound equipment. Every day whenever they said there is shooting the sound equipment used to arrive. P K Viswanath was the recordist, he used to come there, record and go. The picture was complete. 'Kabir Das' was complete and it was released. About financial matters, I don't know as it was a Chellam Talkies internal matter.

01:46:12

Q: After you left Satap Chettiar Meenakshi Cinetone, what did you do?

A : I went to Calcutta. I joined as an assistant cameraman in Tollywood studios. Tollywood Studios - Rai Bahadur Karnani was the proprietor that's where Mr Boman D Irani was the chief cameraman. And the present G. Singh, I still see him. I remember seeing his name G. Singh and he was doing colour work also. He must be about 80 years old now and his name I still keep seeing in pictures. He was the second unit cameraman while Boman D Irani was the first unit cameraman, with him Mr Prakash also came to Calcutta. He was engaged by his MSM A.V. Meiyappan Chettiar.

01:47:14

Q: Mr A T Krishnaswamy told us about that part of it.

A : Sagarika!

01:47:19

Q: That was the name of the picture? is it?

A: Yes. 'Sagarika'. They took on Rathna Bai, Sarawasthy Bai in that film. Then after that his personal matters which we don't need to know. Then he was working for them. Through his influence I joined them as one of their assistants to Boman Irani, where I saw how electric lights were being used and how the shooting was done for the first time. During the day time even without sunlight so they were doing it in Tollygunge Studio.

01:47:57

Q: So they were using Tollygunge Studio? That was a new thing for you?

A : That was a new thing there. But I had an obligation while editing 'Lankadahan'. Because it was printed shot by shot and I was the man who printed that. And I was the man who knew the order. So all that was done by East India Film Company, Calcutta where Mr K. Subramaniam was producing this picture - 'Naveen Sarangadhara' . At that time there was some editing going on.

01:48:35

Q: There was no movie hall over there?

A : There was a movie hall over there.

01:48:40

Q: In Calcutta, they had a Movie hall?

A: In Calcutta, they had a movie hall. They had an automatic developing plant. This East India Film Company was a full-fledged studio having all facilities. There were two recordists by name one Mr Nigam and there was another Mr. Jothichandra Sinha. There were two people. There were two cameramen, Sailen Bose and Kamal Ghosh.

01:49:07

Q: Who later came to Madras?

A : They were all important to Subramaniyan and there was one makeup man Haripatha Chandra. This Dhiren Das Gupta cinelab man worked in a laboratory. He was known as Brahma. There they also had a hand and tank developing system. To turn the drum those people were using a 1000 feet rack, in one track there were 11 feet. They made the triple track one in one inside. There were three One in one inside. One was bigger track the other one will go into this smaller and another one into littler smaller. First, he took the smallest and he will roll on that. If this was completed, he would put one hook and go for the second one. It will go from one side to another side. One by one he had to finish. It will take up to 1000 feet.

01:50:16

Q: The whole thing will be 1000 feet length:

A: 1000 feet length. To roll on this instead of using dishes they will take vertical tanks lined with lead and each rolling 80 gallons of the developer. We need 4 people for each side. It would be 5 to 6 ½ inches. We need to put the tank in the platform Underground. It would go inside for 3 ½ inches, he should send it slowly and bubbles would appear. And there they had a timer every minute we will have to take it up then reverse it and immerse..

01:51:04

Q: It is quite a tough Job to do it that way?

A: It is a tough job. But they had a lot of technical flaws. That is not our concern now.

01:51:12



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Q: So you worked in Calcutta in Tollygunge?

A: Tollygunge in East India Film company. That's how I know Mr Dhiren Das Gupta very well.

01: 51:20

Q: What films did you do in Calcutta?

A: I edited this Lankaradaham afterwards I continued as an assistant cameraman. I was paid Rs. 75/- per month salary in Calcutta in 1935. In that salary I had to live there for myself and I had to support my family in Madras.

01:51:42

Q: You were not married at that time? You were a bachelor?

A: No, I was a Bachelor. This is in 1935 my father lost his business. I had to support them as I was the eldest son. I was doing it as long as I was in Madras. But from Calcutta by earning Rs.75 and still trying to support them was rather difficult. But I managed for 6 months. There was One madras boarding lodge in Central Avenue. For one seat they were charging Rs. 7 a month and 4 people were living in one room. For 30 tickets they used to charge 10 rs.

01:52:27

Q: Meal tickets?

A: Meal Tickets.

01:52:29

Q: 10 Rs for the entire month that is 60 meals?

A: 60 meals. One Anna was required to travel from Esplanade to Tollygate in a tram. One Anna...No paisa and all in that time. In that amount, there were two types of tickets... first-class 1 ¼ anna and second class 1 ana.

01:52:48

Q: Oh in the tram you had two classes?

A: Two classes. One anna class, we used to walk from tollygate corner to East India

Company. In the Corner first studio was Bharathloki, which is Bhara Bhai's studio. They used to call it as BharathLoki, next one was new theatres situated diagonally opposite. After that East India Film Company. There were three studios there.

01:53:24

Q: So you worked in East India also?

A : East India also till the film was edited. There were two editors there one was Dharamveer who came here to madras afterwards and joined Subramaniam and the other one was Baithiyanatha Joshi. These two people were editors. And in the Camera department there was one Mr Jatin Das. That man was working for only one director - DGN...Dhiren Ganguly.

01: 54:04

Q: I know, a very famous name in....

A: He died later. He was working for only that man. Jatin das and Dhiren Ganguly were in one shift. This Sailen bose was Cameraman who worked for others. Kamal Ghosh was assistant to Shailen Bose. This is as long as I was in Calcutta.

01:54:26

Q: How long were you there in Calcutta?

A: I was there for 8 months.

01: 54:30

Q: What other pictures did you work on apart from Lankadahan?

A : There was one picture shot by Prakash which was produced by Royal talkie distributors Madurai. Krishna Arjuna Yuddam in which Nagaswamy Bhagavathor.

01:54:52

Q: Nagaswamy Bhagavathor? A new name to me.

A: He was a singer. After that, some more people were there.

01:55:02



ntai

Q: That was directed by R.Prakash and cranked by you?

A: No I did not crank I was only an Assistant. I was allowed to go and see. Because this Boman Irani would not allow me to touch the camera.

01:55:12

Q: Oh I see... Even his assistants could not touch?

A: I was the third Assistant.

01: 55:17

Q: Who used to operate the camera?

A: There was another assistant, one Ghosh. He wouldn't allow me to touch the camera and he had made a device which used to create a shock if we touch the camera.

01:55:35

Q: If you touch the camera it will shock? That could be dangerous.

A: There was one side switch. He has taken that wire from the switch and kept that in the body of the camera.

01:55:46

Q: To discourage others from touching it.

A: That was the nature of Booma Irani? If anyone touches it unknowing, they may get a slight shock. He didn't like anyone touching his camera.

01:56:00

Q: He did not like it. He was Jealous?

A: Very Jealous Fellow. He wouldn't allow me to see through the viewfinder. That was how he treated you. So I thought there is no point in spending so much time there. Then I tried to switch over to G. Singh. He was a nice man who said that you will not understand. Here there will be mishaps. Go to some other studio I will speak in East India, I will speak to sulen go and meet him. He told me so. What I thought they all are keeping the lights like this and nobody had any meters. Even those fellows never had any measuring meters. This is Front Light, this is soft light and thick light they had kept it. There only I came to know that light could be fixed over the top of sets.

01:57:09

Q: Cat Walk?

A: Oh... catwalk like that. I saw all those things there. We did not have all those in our places. I understood all the tricks. Camera rolling and all those things I knew much earlier... threading and operating and all that. Focusing, aperture all these things I could know. So I thought it was of no use. I tried to borrow some books from him. He had books.

01:57:36

Q: Who Irani?

A: Irani. He had a book on makeup. I saw that in his hand. I asked him to lend it to me one day for reading, but he refused. I said to Mr. I know more English than what you know. I told him in this way. I know more English than what you know. Don't tell me that I don't know how to read. If you don't want to give me don't give. My position was assistant. I wanted some help from him. But when he told me it touched my humanity. Then he said, "Acha take this, bring it back in the morning". That was around 8 pm and he wanted me to bring it back by 8 am. Ok, I took that book with me and read that. In that makeup he talks about anatomy, he talks about the structure of faces. What is Cheekbone? What is Conical face? What is a round face? What an eyelash is and all those things. Then he says how to soften grey hair. We have to separate that hair and soak it in the water for 24 hrs and we need to comb it.

01:59:04

Q: All tips were there?

A: These things were there. I had just taken it out and kept it. If I had asked him one more time he would have not provided it for reading. So night till 2 am I read it and went through it. And found there are so many things to be learnt but it was not very easy. About Greece paint, I learned it should be applied in such a manner that it should cover all the pores of the skin. That is the purpose for which Greece paint is used. Because in cinema on the screen the picture is magnified so many times.

02:00:00

Q: (inaudible) No it's also important that your personal experience is also counted. The last time when we met on Saturday we came up to your stay in Calcutta where you worked under Boman Irani and found that though you learnt something on your own



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it was not of much use to you because you were not making much progress there. After that what happened? After the adventure with Boman Irani.

A: Afterwards, I had to return to Madras to find a job for myself. So by the time I came here the place in which I was working was occupied by one Mr Sundar M Nadkarni. By that time he brought one (inaudible) camera. He came, demonstrated the camera and became a cameraman himself. And he was allowed to direct films by that time.

02:01:04

Q: I see in these 7 or 8 months when you stayed in Calcutta and he had progressed to become a director?

A: Progressed to become a director. After finding that there were only two Studios that existed then in Madras.

02:01:13

Q: One was Meenakshi Cinetone.

A: One was by then it was called Sundaram sound studio. They changed the name.

02:01:21

Q: But the same management?

A: Management by P A Satap Chettair of Kaleeswarar Mills and the other Studio was Whale pictures.

02:01:30

Q: Whale pictures. Was it on Teynampet in the beginning?

A: By then it was shifted to Guindy, P V Das was the Managing Director, M T Rajan and P P Sarathi and Jayantrao Thakur. These four people were principal directors of this concern. The Other Studio which was working was only National Movietone which was owned by T.S.P.L.P Chidambaram Chettiar.

02:02:00

Q: Where was the studio? KhushalDas Garden was it?

A: Next to Khushaldas Garden that's Poonamallee High Road. Subsequently there was an income tax office that is very nearby. That is called National Movietone, in which

there were technicians. Jiten Banerjee was the chief cameraman, Dilshad Irani was the sound recordist and shantharam was the art director. H shantharam, he was called by them from Pune.

02:02:41

Q: He is from Pune it seems?

A : He comes from Kolhapur that was set up there. So finding there was no other opportunity I went to Satap Chettiar. He offered me services in any capacity that is possible. So he told me he needs a laboratory man. So I said yes I worked, I was given a job in the lab. The first time they purchased a Bell and Havel printing machine. Before that such a printing machine was not seen by me. I was in Calcutta though I had seen Debrri Matigo printing machine and all that not this in Bell and Havel. So this Bell and Havel machine was given to me with tank and rack development having certain (inaudible). I was conducting a laboratory in which Mr Sundar M Nadkarni was the cameraman who was continuing to complete Kabir Das.

02:03:48

Q: Oh it was still on even at that time? It was not over?

A: Yes yes. It was not over and I also processed. Mr - I have to say certain facts.

02:04:01

Q: Facts are welcomed. Though, it may be unpleasant but welcomed facts are facts.

A: Though they are unpalatable Mr Sundarrao Nadkarni did not know how to expose properly. There were no exposure metres available and he had to shoot in sunlight for which he was not accustomed to. He was working in the Film Centre under Mr Sarpotdar where they were accustomed to work under electric lights. So when he was faced with this complication he did some work but produced such very very heavy dense negative. Very dense, heavy negative which was unprintable on the Bell and Havel printing machine. Actually the Bell and Havel printing machine had from 1 to 22 numbers, which is the scale in which you had to print . But the negatives were so dense even in 22 you don't get an exposure to the positive. I found it very difficult and they were finding fault with my printing. When they saw the print Sundar Rao Nadkarni would say that's what I called him (Omit the name Sundar M Nadkarni). He used to say the print is under. I tried to explain to him look here, your negative is so dense and on this printing machine you cannot get any better print even by forced development. I couldn't get more than outlines of the picture. Then I studied the mechanism of the

machine. The machine consisted of, it is a DC light, light source is DC, not AC. Wherever printing and other things come, photography is concerned only DC is used because of its steadiness. AC has got that 50 cycles fluctuations so DC is preferred. Wherever speed is necessary they use AC. When I opened the machine and saw that particular bulb was rated to 115 volts. 115 and 60 watts. It has a very peculiar vertical filament and a screw-type gap which was not available in the market. Then I had an idea if we use higher wattage of bulb probably this could be printed. I did not know much about electricity or anything. So I approached one of the supposed technicians in those days Cheryl Biggs.

02:06:50

Q: Who later on became a sound engineer in Gemini.

A: He was a sound engineer in the Whale pictures whom I knew. I approached him. I sent him one sample and there was a motor generating set which used to convert 230 AC to 110 DC. That is what is known as a motor generating set being used even now. If you don't have that then you have to use 110 volts DC battery. To avoid that they purchased a motor generating set which had a voltmeter. That voltmeter would be operated by increase or decrease provision but, I was afraid if I used more than 100-115 volts. This rated voltage of the bulb was only 115 the bulb may not stand. So to find out I called Mr Bigg and then I asked if I use a little more voltage what will happen? Then he said no no no you may fuse the bulb. No bulb should be used more than rated voltage. Then I said I have no other way then I told this gentleman, look here with this printing machine with this negative I cannot give you better print. So Satap Chettiar immediately telephoned to Bombay and Bombay film Centre people sent a man by name Navinchandra Heerchand Zaveri.

02:08:24

Q: Now running that silver studio near Purasawalkam?

A: Yes, He was a printer there. He was sent down here. As soon as he came I showed him this negative I showed him the positive and all that. Then he said it's alright he straight away started the motor generating set and set that voltage metre to 125 and printed. Then I found when he set the voltmeter to 125 I thought the bulb would be fused. According to Mr Cheryl Biggs advice, it never did, it produced light and the print was there and the print was good. When they saw the same print coming out of the same negative is presentable. They thought he is the man to be blamed and Krishnaswamy is a bloody fool. So they said from today Zaveri will be the chief of the laboratory then Krishnaswamy is again on road. Then I said shall I go home? Cost me at least but Zaveri said no, I need an assistant. He seems to know all the work but there

are certain intricacies of the equipment which he did not understand but his presence is necessary. That's what he told them. I was absorbed as a printer. From then on I became an expert printer much more than Zaveri himself because I knew this machine could be operated in this way. So I continued and afterwards I was being used whenever any technicians were absent. I was an all-rounder. Assistant editor, printer, assistant cameraman like that, all-purpose man. Mr. Satap Chettair found me useful and whenever there was outdoor work to be shot on a silent camera they used to send me. Likewise they sent me all the way to Banaras.

02:10:48

Q: What was the reason?

A: To produce some outdoor shots to be used for Kabirdas, as background material. Kabir Das was supposed to have worked in Banaras and this man, he was a weaver. He weaves cloth and he takes it to the market. And he sells it there around selling at the outside market and gets some money and used to go. These are the shots that were necessary, along with the Kasinathan temple and Buddha Gaya, all shots of outdoor scenes were shot there. That's how I was being used here. Meanwhile, the picture was over then there was a Raja Bhakthi produced by the same unit for which Sundar M Nadkarni was the director. T N Patali was working in the post office on Mount road. I think he was a postmaster general or he was an officer. He belongs to Suguna Vilasa Sabha. T.N Patali. He was given the role of Vikranta. And Saraswatibai, Ratnabai and R B Lakshmi Devi were all other lady artists.

02:12:15

Q: This Raja Bhakthi is the play which was written by V.C.Gopalratnam?

A: V.C.Gopalratnam was a writer in Tamil but that was originally written by a Maharashtrian writer. That is how Mr Sundar M Nadkarni selected that subject but they had adopted V.C. Gopalratnam's Tamil version for which one Yana Vaidyanath Iyer was the music director.

02:12:42

Q: Yana Vaidyanath Iyer? He resembled an elephant or what?

A: His title is in that.

02:12:48

Q: He was a music director?

A: Music director and mostly Saraswatibai and Ratnabai used to direct him as to what sort of music is to be composed.

02:13:00

Q: They had the Upper Hand.

A: Upper Hand because they were the proprietor, what to say? And there was B R Panthalu who acted for the first time in Tamil picture.

02:13:13

Q: I see he was already in Tamil by that time? Not now, not through Samsara Nauka?

A: He was not in Tamil he was on stage in Samsara Nauka. He was brought to Tamil by Satap Chettair in which he played as Gurujaya. Raja bhakthi was his first Tamil film.

02:13:31

Q: When was this, 1937/36?

A: 1937. He played a role. That picture was complete. During the middle of the picture, Mr K Subramanyam started a Studio by name MPPC, here the present Gemini for which he brought technicians from Calcutta. Sailen Bose, Kamal Ghosh, Haripal Chandra, Jyothish Chandra Sinha as the recordist, all the rest. But he had taken one recordist from this place, one Mr P K Viswanathan. He was taken as a sound recordist in MPPC. Along with him. Yellappa was seen working as an assistant cameraman for Sundar Rao Nadkarni and he was already known to Mr Subramanyam. He was also called there and he went back as an assistant to Sailen Bose. So that assistant cameraman's job was vacant for which automatically the charge fell on me and I said I will work. I took up Raja Bhakthi in the middle; from half of the picture because I had to be able to work all by myself. Mr Sundar Rao Nadkarni had a speciality of looking after direction all alone by himself and the lead camera was handed to me because he had confidence in me. It went on for some time. That picture was over then they started another picture by name 'Bhookailasa' in Tamil in which one lady by the name Hansadamayanti acted, singer and dancer. And Nagercoil Mahadevan as Naradan, it was his first film I think and P.V. Santhanam as Ravana. This play was already played by Kannada people. I don't know whether they had obtained rights but they called Bhukailasa and adopted the same story again, directed by Nadkarni. Then they found, according to Chettair, Nadkarni was too strained because he was working as a cameraman and director. Though for practical purposes I was working as a

cameraman but he was responsible. So they thought of bringing in a cameraman from Bombay. They chose a really good cameraman. 'Life is a stage' you know Debaki Bose's 'Life is a stage'. That picture was cranked by one Mr Hari Bhai Patel who was a Gujarati. He was asked to come; these people did not give him a straight away job. They wanted him to give a trial, asked him to work for a day and show his results for which he agreed. He came to the studio and I came to know all about it. Then I thought I should ascertain my rights as a man who has been working at the same place for several years. When a man of such reputation is given a chance to show his merit, why should they not offer me the same chance to show whether I am capable of working by myself. I thought I was reasonable in demanding that. I approached the proprietor Chettiar. Unfortunately, I could not see him earlier but on the open set I had to encounter and the camera was asked to be set up. I said I would like to talk to you for a few minutes. I said you know I have been working here for several years. I am well versed with all these departments. And you yourself know I have been doing silent camerawork for our outdoors. In previous pictures also I have been working, though the credit was not mine reasonably. You should offer to give me a chance. If I can equip myself equally well, if not better, you give me 50% of the salary what you gave him. But call me a cameraman, that's all I want. Then he said, you complete today's work we will see about it later on. Whether I work for this one day or one minute or one year assistant is assistant. Hereafter I am not willing to work as an assistant to anybody either you give me your trial or you settle my account. Being a very rich man at that time in the presence of M.S.M.M Chettair and R.K. Shanmugam Chettair, and others who were there to witness the shooting. Probably he found that my talk was rather very impertinent and he said alright you can settle your account and go. Then I said I must be paid now. He said come and collect tomorrow, tomorrow I won't step into your studio. He made arrangements to pay immediately. I walked out at midnight. Hari Bhai Patel continued and they went on working. Later I suffered a lot for one reason that I won't like to work as an assistant to anybody though I had offers from Sailen Bose, from Faredoon Irani. Because one Mr P.K. Mishra had one influence, K Subramanyam's influence. They said you will be able to improve your work and then I said my mind is made up. I would like to be an independent cameraman. You give me any amount of salary, I am not bothered about that but I wouldn't like to be called an assistant. I suffered hell-like trouble, there were no other studios. Then there was only one studio modern theatre in salem. That was started in 1936 by Mr T.R. Sundaram. I never approached. I was waiting for an opportunity. I thought someday will come, when I may have work but suffering was great still I resisted. At last God sent one Mr C V Raman who was known to me already. I had worked for him as a cameraman for LankaDahanam. He had signed a contract with modern theatres to produce partnership pictures for which he wanted a cameraman.

02:21:11

Q: What was that film?

A: Anand Ashram.

02:21:14

Q: This is not that Bengali 'Anand Ashram', it is something else.

A: It has nothing to do with that. Just a similar titled 'Anand Ashram', in which C.V.V Panthulu, I don't know whether he is alive or not. R.B. Lakshmi Devi was the heroine and there were other people like N.S. Krishnan, Madhuram.

02:21:36

Q: By that time whether they were together N.S. Krishnan and Madhuram? They were already together?

A: Yes because they got together in Ambikapathy which was prior to this.

02:21:47

Q: And when was this Anand Ashram made?

A: 1938.

02:21:53

Q: You went there as a cameraman?

A: I went there as the freelance cameraman, not on behalf of the producer. I had nothing to do with the studio Modern Theatres. I was not an employee of modern theatres at all. I was employed by Mr C V Raman. He gave me a hundred rupees salary per month. The Studio's contribution was a hundred rupees. In all, I was paid 200 rupees in 1938.

02:22:22

Q: How did it run with the salaries of technicians in those days? Do you have any idea?

A: That was a big salary then. Hari Bhai Patel with all that fame and was working in Sundaram studios for only 300 rupees per month.

02:22:36

Q: And how much was the director paid in those days? Do you have any idea? Were they also on a monthly salary or picture basis?

A: Directors were paid on a picture basis. The maximum salary a director had drawn according to my knowledge was Y.V.Rao for 'Chintamani' which amounted to 5000 rupees. 5000 was very very big money for Chintamani. Sundar Rao Nadkarni was paid 200 rupees salary. For direction, I don't know whether they paid him some lump sum presentation or something like that. He was satisfied that he was called as a director. That's all.

02:23:18

Q: Then you went to Anand Ashram?

A: I completed the picture.

02:23:23

Q: What type of picture was this Anand ashram?

A: That was a social picture.

02:23:27

Q: It was not based on any freedom movement or any revolution?

A: There was no social message or anything like that. He was trying to make money by making some sort of picture. Mr Raman, some music-

02:23:42

Q: -Who was the music director?

A: I don't remember perhaps. I remember I think Kalyanam was the music director.

02:23:50

Q: Was it T.A. Kalyanam? Was he very popular at that time as a music director?

A: He was the top music director at that time.

02:23:58

Q: What about S.V. Venkataraman?

A: S.V. Venkataraman came much later. S.V. Venkataraman came as an actor first and by accident, he lost his hand in a motor accident. He was brought by Devi people. He showed his talent as music director later. A.V. Meiyappan picked him up and took him to Kolhapur. He produced Nandakumar's with T.R Mahalingam.

02:24:30

Q: That story he has been telling us. And this 'Anand ashram' was shot entirely in the studio or there was also outdoor shooting?

A: Outdoor hinge and others that were done in yercaud. Not yercaud we could do as much as yercaud because it was a partnership picture. Studio premise and the raw stock was given by studio and all the other expenditure was made by the producer for which R Padmanabhan was the financier who produced pictures later. He was the financier, totally he financed 20,000 rupees for the picture.

02:25:13

Q: That was all the cost? Only 20,000 to make the entire film?

A: That was all the cost to make half of the film. Film and costume was all the cost. The cost for which artist salary, food, conveyance, travelling everything is inclusive.

02:25:27

Q: What was the artist's salary like?

A: C.V.V Panthulu got 1,000 rupees all on picture basis. Nobody was given a monthly salary. All were on picture basis all were used to be in a lodge in one place. They were given food and lodging and all expenses to the producer. And they were to be ready at the second call of the producer. At any moment the producer calls they must be ready.

02:25:57

Q: So they couldn't dictate the terms as they do today?

A: They could not leave the premises so strict it was. Though it never appeared to be strict they took it as a common feature. It was the convention. That's how that picture was produced. He sold that picture for a profit to Shankar films, Salem. He made some money out of it. That money made must be a few thousand rupees, today it must be in

lacs. But those days 10000 rupees was very big money. That's how I came back after finishing the picture. I came back to Madras and started looking for a job. By that time do you want to tell me about me or other General Information?

02:26:44

Q: No, tell about yourself what you did and how you progressed. After you came back from Anand Ashram you came back to Madras?

A: If you ask general questions that would be better otherwise it would become my history.

02:26:56

Q: That doesn't matter, your history is part of film history. Film history is part of your history. They are all intermingled, you know. History is always built around people, not just events. Events are again created by people so it doesn't matter if you talk about yourself. Your experiences that's what we are interested in.

A: I joined Sundaram Studios once again before that I made a very big venture in 1939. I and one Mr Zaveri - Silver Studios man and Chandu Bhai Vakil who was the Managing partner of Gevaert film distributors.

02:27:40

Q: Gevaert film distributors? People were distributing Gevaert films.

A: Gevaert films in Madras. All three of us joined together and we leased out a studio. How it happened was - the National Movietone studio which was owned by T.S.P.L.P Chidambaram Chettiar in which Jiten Banerjee was a chief technician and Harikrishnan was another laboratorian.

02:28:07

Q: What happened with that Studio venture you leased it out?

A: I'll tell you how we came to the leasing of the studio. Jiten Banerjee felt that just for him they cannot run the studio, particularly the laboratory. Even those days, somehow they got the latest Decri matigo printing machine in National movie tone which was not available anywhere in the south.

02:28:37

Q: But was that an active Studio by then?

A : It was active, but it happened to be in East India Film Company where I was working in Calcutta. There I happened to meet (inaudible). He was the chief laboratorian in Calcutta. There Dhiren Das Gupta, Sudheer, Jaywant Bose all these people were assistants. Since I was editing the film there, I had a lot of leisure time, where I got an idea that these people are working with the latest equipment. I requested (inaudible) to allow me to teach how this Debri Matigo printing machine's working. He was kind enough to allow me inside the printing room and for a few days I worked over there. I learnt how to credit on the film and how to run the machine, what all was essential. There used to be, there was a system in making a light flip card. We had to prepare a light Flip card for that which I was also learnt. So I thought it was worthwhile learning but came in good's rules and properly came up. This T.S.P.L.P Chidambaram Chettiar found that he was not able to run this studio; he wanted something to be printed. He had some old films.

02:30:21

Q: Simantini Kalyaanam that was the name of the film made by him.

A: Directed by Ellis R Duncan.

02:30:25

Q: Ellis R Duncan was already in India during that time?

A: It is Sathi Leelavati. First picture... Second picture was of Simantini Kalyaanam. He was there.

02:30:33

Q: That was in 1936 I think with M.K.Radha.

A : Punjab Kesari T.R.G. Ravan and K.P.K and all that. They had a picture which they wanted to be printed and they found there was no other alternative than to send it to Bombay and get it printed. They had all the equipment in their studio but no manpower. There was little difference of opinion between the technician. Fortunately for me, one Mr Lakshman Chettiar who was the brother of Satap Chettiar, who was manager when I was working there had some rub with him and he had join T.S.P.S Chidambaram.

02:31:20

Q: That is not Lena by any chance?

A: He used to be called Lena but that was not his original name. This gentleman with that T.S.P.L.P Chidambaram Chettiar, he wanted to show just for his Pride that I can get a man who can work here in the studio. If Jiten is not able to work I will produce a man who can give you the print. Then he approached me, he said can you give me a print. I said what printing machine they have got. He asked me to come and meet there. I went and saw that it was a known printing machine to me. All the rest were useless tank and rack development. Then I said yes I will do , then I said how much will you pay he said you ask. I didn't know much, I said you give me 50 rupees during print this is all I asked. But all the machines that you have to supply, machines used to be sent those days. Developer needed ice as there were no air cooling fans and chemicals they had to supply. He said alright so I came to Sundaram studios laboratory where a set of boys were working under me. They were working during day time there. I said look here from tonight you come with me to such and such place we have got some work. Every night we have to work for a few hours. We may have two or three days of work. They said all right morning I used to go pick all by myself, make all the prints used in the picture at about 16000 feet. That printing machine runs at 40 feet per minute slower than the Bell & Havel machine. I used to do all the printing and file them up in key in. Evening these boys used to come and one night we were completing one print. Like that in 5 days we completed print. For 6 prints I got a lump sum of 300 rupees which was very big money then. Then I thought this seems to be better business anyhow these people are keeping it idle. So I gave a proposition to Mr Lakshman Chettiar, 'look here sir you give this laboratory on lease to me'. I will make prints whenever you want and whenever others want and all that Can work. Because there are so many people who want old prints to be printed, what do you say? He said you give me some time. I will talk to Chettair and let you know. In the meanwhile, I had to think of Finance also. We used to meet at our meeting place which used to be this Gevaert film office in the evening. This is on Mount Road Zaveri, I and Chandu Bhai Vakil we used to meet. Chandu Bhai Vakil was very much in favour of me for one obligation which I had done for him was very strongly recommending Gevaert film positive for printing positives. That is when I was working with Satap Chettait. All Raja Bhakthi prints were made on Gevaert film positive. So he was sympathetic. He probably wanted to reciprocate with what help I did for him. Then I told him look here, I want to take a laboratory on lease. Probably they would ask for some money and we would like to go ahead then what will you do? I said I can invest 400 rupees, Zaveri said I will invest 600 rupees. This is our investment. Then he said alright the balance I will invest you can take it. We said terms? You first say yes and come and talk to me. We will discuss the terms. After 3-4 days, Lena called me and said look here why only Laboratory? Chettiar is willing to give the entire Studio on lease what do you say?



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Entire Studio I don't have the money to take that studio on lease and all that. No, I will arrange it at a very cheap price for you. It will be very easy. What is it? He said a thousand rupees a month for the entire Studio including the lab, floor, lights everything. There was a lot of dress material so everything on campus will be under your charge. As long as you pay three month's rent in advance that's all. I will get you that for one year Lease. What Chettair wanted was to see that without the help of Jiten Banerjee the studio can work.

02:36:33

Q: I see.. So that was his ambition? and you can take up his challenge?

A : Naturally Yes...Then I said give me 8 days time. I will discuss and let you know tomorrow. With that proposition, I came then I put the proposition to Chandu Bhai Vakil. Then he asked how much you want in the beginning? In the beginning 4000 rupees. He terms it as one of his advances, probably thousand rupees for other expenditure. You took the right decision, don't worry, we will make a law agreement and make a draft law. We used to talk with him in Hindi. When I said yes, I am agreeable, he said alright I will draft an agreement. An agreement was drafted for one year. These are the terms and it took me 15 days to take an inventory of the entire stock that they had. There were so many materials for which they wanted all the details. If you say camera so many lenses and those were alright. But the dress material there was the staff there and he wanted to find out how many pearl sets, how many earrings, how many ornaments, how many coats, how many dresses. He took me through one 28 pages of inventory. I took all that. We took charge of the studio on the first of September 1939. Took the key then we installed our board by the name Pravin studios. That was the name selected by Mr Chandulal Vakil. Naturally, we had to say yes. On the 2nd morning paper, I saw war was declared. The second world war began. I saw the paper in the morning at 6 o'clock. At 9 o'clock Chandu Bhai Vakil's office was locked because it was Belgium, German's office. He was living in that premises on Mount Road itself. At 9 o'clock we both Zaveri and I went there and saw there was a big lock. Then we went around and tried to find out, they said that the entire family was moved out. It is under lock and it will be keyed by the government. There may be some internal camp or some such thing which will not be known for a couple of days. Then we made enquiries in all police stations. Fortunately, they were not entered being Indians. Only thing is they should not (inaudible) business. Their business was sealed. They were allowed to leave. So, all our enthusiasm for finance is completely extinct.

02:39:47

Q: So you did not pay Chettiar yet?

A: We ran the studio for 1 year, shot two pictures in it.

02:39:54

Q: How did you manage that without 'vakils' support?

A: That went on with canvassing and all that. The first picture was of S.D.S.Yogi, the poet-writer who was working for Mayura film. Mayura films was owned by one Chettair. Soudrangan Chettair and one C.T. Chidambaram Chettiar. They produced luck. They were the two producers.

02:40:21

Q: Name of the picture was luck? In Tamil?

A: K R Chellam and Surya Kumari in which Surya Kumari song became so very popular that was written by S.D.S.Yogi.

02:40:40

Q: It was called Athirstam in Tamil.

A: Tamil Athirstam luck.

02:40:44

Q: Was it directed by S.Soundararajan?

A: No, it was directed by Yogi himself.

02:40:50

Q: What was Sounderajan's role in that? Did he distribute it or-

A: Soundararajan might have lent some money because these Chettiars by themselves were rich.

02:40:56

Q: Because he once told me years back that this Athirstam was his picture. I don't know because at that time I was not into films.

A: No, He is G.R. Rao... you know one Mr G.R. Rao. He was doing some production job and afterwards I didn't see him. Is he alive? I don't think he is alive, he is older than me and he was very sick. He was Assistant to S.D.S.Yogi then.

02:41:27

Q: Who? G.R.Rao was Yogi's assistant?

A: Then, He once introduced me to him.

02:41:33

Q: Luck was a successful film? Did it bring luck to the producer? The song became popular, of course.

A: Song became very popular but the producer felt that according to Chettair, he lost money. They did not made money because they had innumerable Censor difficulties.

02:41:49

Q: So they had Censor problems in that picture?

A: The main objection was rape.

02:41:53

Q: Rape was it? The subject of rape was attempted in 1938-39 by Yogi.

A: Rape had to be proved in the court. A trial scene that was supposed to be the greatest trial scene ever shot in Tamil pictures. Mr Yogi had shot it wonderfully then as per my memories of those days. I thought he had done wonderfully well because the entire onus of proof is to penetrate. And that was discussed in so many terms and for which the censor people said to remove, this and that. And these people filed a suit saying the very object of proving a rape case is that the penetration has occurred or not. If you are not able to prove the penetration then there is no rape. He made a film like that and he fought in court against the censor board. They could not stand the case afterwards. They had conceded so they removed certain portions and allowed some portions. They showed everything the grip on busts. The male grip was shown. Then that fellow then the opposition lawyer asks whether the grips on the top or bottom. Then that fellow says I couldn't say, then that lawyer says he had not seen it. Nobody holds breast like this, they are held only in that way. It was shot as a sensational scene but all that had been removed.

02:43:58

Q: He shot it as he visualised. He planned it and shot it? He must have been a very bold man?

A: He shot it with the help of K Ramnath who was the cameraman. Ramnath was a cameraman for Athristam and Shekhar was an art director plus sound recordist. But there were three sets of technicians by the time the whole picture was complete.

02:44:19

Q: But did it take so long to complete that?

A: Yes it did because there were so many difficulties about the finances. Set of People who got the work were Jiten Banerjee and Mitran, one cameraman. There was one mitran who had been here for a very long time and then K Ramnath. Three cameramen were on Dilshad Irani, recordist, Boman Saroj and one recordist. Boman Saroj came along with Boman Irani. Boman Saroj, one recordist and one Dilshaad, these three people worked on the picture. H Shantharam also was art director for some time. All these photographs will be available in S.D.S.Yogi's house.

02:45:21

Q: So you were introduced to S.D.S.Yogi related to your new Studio Pravin?

A: I was introduced much earlier. When I heard that he was trying to shoot a picture with one PRC Kannaswamy Chettair of Salem. That gentleman was the producer and for whom this S.D.S.Yogi was appointed as director. Because he had a reputation by then as he worked with Ellis R Duncan for "two brothers". You know there was a picture titled two brothers. Parmeshwar Sound Pictures produced it which was directed by Ellis R Duncan.

02:46:09

Q: When was this? Do you remember? 1930's?

A: Not so early - It should be around '36.

02:46:21

Q: He worked as his assistant? Duncan's assistant?

A: No no, he wrote the script and dialogues for Duncan. That's how S.D.S.Yogi's name was known as a 'film man'.

02:46:36

Q: What was he doing earlier before he came into films?

A: He was only a poet. He did a lot of poems - original poems, wrote a lot of books. He was a literary man, a very good Tamil scholar and used to publish into English also. Because of that work these people had booked him. Since I knew him personally, when I heard that he is making a picture for PRC Kannaswamy Chettiar we went and approached him with a proposal. This is giving out some business secret matter which was known to everybody. Then I said, "look here we are owning a studio called National Movietone Studio. It has got all the types of equipment". Yes yes... I know you have got sound equipment, you have got a laboratory, you have got a movie camera, you have got dresses, this thing that thing everything. Let us make that picture in a 50-50% partnership. It made them think as it was just a lot of burden on them. So they thought that this man was known to us. At that time the recordist was Sheshadri who had not made a full film recording by then. There is one Ramanathan. I hear that has expired recently. Ramanathan and his assistant Sheshadri also said yes and we signed the contract. We fixed up a certain date for the picture to be produced. Before that they wanted to show what sort of quality they were able to produce. So we were searching for people, caught hold of Mr Murgudas. Murgudas knew me.

02:48:38

Q: Was he already in films then? Murugadas?

A: Yes he was directing. He directed One film in Andhra in Vizagapatam; there was a studio known as Andhra film studio or Andhra film corporation. They produced the film over there.

02:49:02

Q: He also directed a Sita Kalyanam isn't it?

A: Sita Kalyanam he went to Prabhat along with Ram Narayanan; that's how he got involved with those people in whale pictures which is much later.

02:49:15

Q: So he was already an established man in films? So you went to Murugudas



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A : We went to Murugadas. We made a film where they wanted to take some retakes. They produced it through some mythology name. Then we heard that he wanted to make those adjustments. I approached; I said those conflicts you can bring to us in our studio. He said you are there and why we should think of anybody else. We shot some footage which came handy to show the producers that this is produced here. This is the camera and this is the shot, this is the sound equipment and this is processed here.

02:50:09

Q : So you cranked all those retakes?

A : Yes - And they were convinced so the picture was commenced. First, for one or two days we want to - (inaudible).

02:50:21

Q : What was the name of this film?

A : The name of the film was “Krishna Kumar” and Yogi was directing the film; He was director, story writer and dialogue writer. Honappa Bhagavathar was playing as Krishna, T.S. Rajalakshmi as heroine and S.B.R. Chandran, Yogi R Subhadra's villain. He had acted in MDR pictures in Kolhapur and the late Sambamoorthy was Nagaraj; he died recently. I was the cameraman. P.S. Gnanam was the comedian as she had worked as a comedian. To commence shooting we had to supply film RAW stock. I went to Chandu Bhai vakils office. They were not allowed to do business but that was the premises in which they were living. So I went and asked him what all we should do for the money in this agreement that we made. What to do? Shall we approach Kodak film for a loan? They will give 90 days credit, after 90 days again we have to play. (inaudible), under his table there was a footrest he had put a leg over that footrest. 1939 (inaudible) that is Gevaert film negative.

02:52:21

Q : I see - He was using it as a footrest?

A : That was condemned for them there were four rolls he was using as footrest. Its cardboard seal was intact. I asked “what is this? Arey that is a film - can we use it? It has been 10 years and it is lying over there. Arey leave it and give it to us”. I took all the stock, took it to Studio and loaded it in the camera. Then I got it checked. There was already some set we had erected. We first exposed the film at normal lighting. Nothing appeared as that was a blank film then I telephoned him and said look here you have a pamphlet of this film. (inaudible) Gevaert film hard file is called “Panchini”, Kodak is

called super sensitive, Gevaert is called (inaudible). These are the three negative names used at those times. I asked for the pamphlet because I wanted to see the colour of the film to which it would respond. Then he sent me the pamphlet. I found this toe was very tight, what you call when you have a grab this toe and when we call it as the shoulder. But actually, photographers were supposed to work on the straight-line portion of it leaving the toe that was underexposed always. Deepest shadows will fall on the toe and overexposed the highlights will over on the shoulder afterwards we will deviate like that. But we have a straight line portion and that straight line portion you can light from bottom to that according to the brightness you need to keep that in any range. That is how it should be worked out. When I saw this toe, itself is so high the straight line is very small. I thought alright we will take another test. I called the Art Director and asked him to paint all these sets yellow - one single colour. (inaudible) they were very safe to use one (inaudible) colour, we don't need to bring (inaudible) colour. We took (inaudible) colour. Wherever there is a red we tried to make it as light as possible. I tried to make it a point to not allow any red colour. Then I made some artists stand over there and gave them some yellow dress and blue dress and green dress and wanted to see how it responds to each colour. I exposed hundreds of feet of films to different exposure. Then developed the third picture with condemned stock. 10-year-old stock gave results, it gave desired pictures I don't know about results but it gave pictures. Then we got some positives and printed them. Out of which I selected what would be the possible normal exposure could be because we had certain lighting equipment only. With the existing lighting equipment, we must be able to use these films and shoot. No, I was talking about (inaudible) films Gevaert negative. With the existing negative after having found out how to make the best use of it. After a series of tests we began using it on regular production. Same stock 10 years old no more called condemned stock. It is the best stock and we told them since Chandu Bhai Vakil was our partner and he was able to give us Gevaert film and that's the reason why we were using Gevaert. So the producers were convinced and completed that film with the required methods of arrangement of working. We shot all those 4,000 feet and produced about 2300 feet out of it and projected to this entire satisfaction of the producer. Nobody had any remarks to pass on the quality of the picture.

02:57:03

Q: Nobody knew it was 10 years old stock except you perhaps.

A: Except me nobody else knew in the studio. What they wanted was some picture to be seen. The picture was well seen; it was comparable to any other pictures of those days. So what methods I had adapted that was their concern. So they were immensely satisfied with that 2,300 feet of Rush both by way of photography and sound. Then came our problem so we had to continue. They had call sheets because all their artists

were kept in one large room. And on second call any day anytime they are required to come and work and they said tomorrow onwards we want the call sheet and then the film is over.

02:58:02

Q: So you needed more stock and more money for that?

A: More stock, more money at least for the daily expenditure. The first difficulty was (inaudible). Then some business crooks came to our rescue. One distributor who happened to be known to me came and I set him up. I said to this man who is willing to purchase our film. Our share of business for a certain price and now we are negotiating with him and he likes to see the positive print which is completed so far. Then we gave a projection to him and we fixed terms with him. Then we handed our share, drew money from them and went on investing. When I put this proposition; which was discussed between myself, Zaveri and Chandu Bhai Vakil to which all of them agreed and said let us see how much it would work. I had put in front of them, and Mr Yogi was considering as he saw me as an absolute truth fare. He had absolute confidence in my work so he never had any doubt about my statement. I don't know about others but others thought in the manner of business. Then they asked how much you are going to sell? I said we can't say we need the money and here is a buyer that may offer something. And we will see if it is not going to be very much. If it's just worth our working cost we will give him. Our working cost would be about 78000 rupees film and probably another 10000 rupees for our studio rent and all that. If it comes anywhere near around 20 - 25000 rupees we will sell. Than Chettair thought if you sell your half of 25000 rupees then I will have to sell my half of 25000 rupees. Nobody has been paying me more, what can we do for that? Then he said you do one thing, "You sell your half to me. I will pay the 25000 rupees but not in one lump sum". Then how do you pay? He said Everyday shooting you need some money in advance. You may need money to buy a film and for some expenses. Alright, everyday shooting we will draw money from you and make that proposal. That suited us well and we said alright then Chandu Bhai Vakil said "Ah, Shabash. Ok some work will happen so let it happen". So with that proposition of getting money every day from them, buy films and try to be as economical as possible. We tried to be as true as possible. We never wanted to cheat them, we tried to complete the picture. But the picture was not complete by the time the picture was about 90% complete the owner of the studio T.S.P.L.P. Chidambaram Chettiar happened to visit the studio at midnight one day. We had a Pathan watchman there. Those days nobody was allowed to enter the studio and it was much worse at night. This gentleman came in the car and said to open that gate. Then Pathan told Hukum Rai Sahab he never Budged and did not open the gate. This man went back home and he got wild and telephoned saying that who was the devil that didn't not

allow me inside my own studio. And this that and this and that. I tried to give him a reason, look here that man is doing his job and he has no-fault. I don't find him faulty. If any of us says that you should do that. No, by the time we were about to give three months rent also so taking advantage of all that he said that we will cancel your agreement and get out. Then we said we have only one more months' time to finish the film and go away. So he said alright within that one month we tried to finish the film as much as possible. During that period, we had taken another picture also by name Mandharwati in which T.R. Rajkumari worked.

03:03:18

Q: Mandharwati? Was that her first picture? T.R.Rajakumari.

A : It was her second picture but the first picture was yet to be released. The first picture was produced by one Sridhar, now he is into (inaudible) battery. He along with his grandfather. I forget his grandfather's name but Adakari Chettiar... not Mudaliar.

03:03:45

Q: What was that film? First film? Because I have seen an old advertisement. Folklore - that was folklore I think.

A : I don't remember - folklore - This is also a sort of Mandharwati directed by T.Margoni.

03:04:03

Q: That man who was doing the sound recording and all that?

A: No no - he was an Italian cameraman.

03:04:06

Q: I know who used to go on a motorcycle. I have seen him in courts when I was a law student. They used to call him "Morecom Margoni" or something like that. Is he the same person?

A : There were two Margoni's, one was T.Margoni, this man was called Tom Margoni the other man was called - other Margoni. He was in Bombay with A.J. Patel who had cranked the first gava colour.

03:04:29



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Q: So this man was in Madras?.

A: This man was in Madras, he was interned during war when the (inaudible) was released.

03:04:37

Q: I mean to digress a little. During that time there was some kind of trouble he had with some women. She had filed a suit against him and he was giving evidence. He used to come on a motorcycle and we were pointed out to that man and said he is a filmmaker and he is an Italian and so on. That's why he was a big built person.

A: Very big built person.

03:04:57

Q: He is the same man, I am sure he is the same person. So he directed that picture? Mandharavati. Is it Minder or Mandar?

A: Mandharvati.

03:05:07

Q: Who were the other artists? Apart from T R Rajkumari. Did she play the heroine?

A: No, she was not the heroine. S.B Subayya and one songster. He is still alive. I believe he is working somewhere in Kotare and company or Methadi - something like that. He was one of them and who was the hero.

03:05:38

Q: You talked about Rajkumari. I want to ask you a specific question. Now you told me that she acted in that Mandharvati. While talking to S.B Subbalaxmi, Mrs K Subramanyam - She told me and I also read an article by Mr K Subramanyam himself many years earlier. That article read that he discovered her in Dhanalakshmi's house, who was her cousin and she was not into films at all. I believe she came to serve coffee or something and they found her. They thought she was the maid and they said no no - this is my cousin or niece or something. She had come here to act and that was how I gave her a break in Kacha Devayani. That is what he said.

A: Kacha Devyani was her third picture.

03:06:26

Q: This story probably was not very true.

A: No story must be quite true but he gave her a position which is alright. But there she also made a mark in Kacha Devyani. His few pictures were not up to the mark at all because they had numerous financial troubles. Somehow they completed the picture and they sent it out. It was very much different. So she could not have made any name at all. By that time nobody knew who T.R. Rajkumari was? But her name became popular in “Kacha Devayani” for one particular reason that was because of a seductive scene.

03:07:05

Q: That bathing scene?

A: No no she had enormous big breasts - enormous big breasts. This Subrahmanyam made good use of it and people liked it.

03:07:22

Q: I remember seeing this as a kid. I was very small at that time. I only remember one particular shot of Rajakumari sitting on an elephant and driving the elephant about. And then I vaguely remember a bathing scene also.

A : From this Kacha Devyani. Ah, the first picture which I remember is Kumar Kulothungan.

03:07:44

Q: Kumar Kulothungan. That advertisement I have seen in some old magazine.

A: Kumar Kulothungan.

03:07:50

Q: So this was her second film?

A: Her Second film was Mandharvati.

03:07:53

Q: Which you made, I think?

A: I made it. I was the cameraman. The third picture was Kacha Devyani.

03:07:59

Q: Who produced this Mandar Vati in your studio?

A: There were two Mudaliar brothers - One Rangaswamy and Vardhan.

03:08:07

Q: You are talking about this R.P.K. Mudaliar?

A: No no - They are other people. R.P.K. Mudaliar's grandson is still alive. You know, Battery Sridharan, his name is my coffee bar and (inaudible) battery. (inaudible) The battery's owner was Sridhar, his father was the producer. Sridhar is known to me. Sridhar's son is still alive and he is doing the same business on Greens Road. His name is Rama Krishna.

03:08:46

Q: So that's how Mandharvati was made at your Pravin studio.

A: Pravin studio on the partnership with them. We played the same trick and we had enormous trouble with them afterwards. Somehow with their money only we made the film and we never spent any money of ours.

03:09:06

Q: So this Margoni how did he come into the picture?

A : Margoni was the director for this T.S.P.L.P Chidambaram for Punjab Kesari. K.C.Subbaiah's pati bhakti and all that. He was director for him T.S.P.L.P. Chidambaram Chettiar.

03:09:22

Q: How did he come to Madras? Do you have any idea about it?

A: I don't know. Both the brothers came and one fellow stayed there at Bombay with A.J.Patel. This man came to Madras. I met him only in the studio before that I did not know him. But he was very rough. There was something Rogan about him.

03:09:50

Q: After MandharVati what happened?

A: The studio was closed. According to me it was over.



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03:09:58

Q: He did not renew the lease. Chettiar?

A : No, finally it was closed and by that time he decided to celebrate Shyama Rama India. And he allowed one Sonam Aana, one of his manager used to run the studio where they went on leasing props. In that studio S.D.S.Yogi produced the picture and partnership with them which is titled as Anandam. In that year S.D.R Chandram Nayakan was a villain. There was one Srinivasan or somebody from Krishnapalli as a hero. Saraswati, her name is B.Saraswati, she is still alive, she is now wife of Kothamangalam Seenu. I don't know whether I can call her a wife but they were living together. She was a songster, she was the heroine and there were other people like gnanam. Kaliyan Rathnam and other people with all the skills they made a partnership picture for which S.A South India pictures Corporation were is the distributors.

03:11:17

Q: Were they big distributors at that time?

A : They were the first distributors in Natraj screen. The first picture they purchased "Sabhapati" of AVM and second picture they purchased was Anandam where maximum investment was 40000 rupees for each picture.

03:11:36

Q: In those days if you ask about the distribution pattern. Was it an outright purchase like we have for Tamil films today or they used to invest money, run the film, take their Commission, take back their investment and payback the overflow? What system was in existence then?

A : Outright purchase is to be existing only in South India particularly in Tamil Nadu nowhere else.

03:12:02

Q: So it was in existence even then? Right from the beginning that was in existence?

A : Yes that's how Mr A Narayanan must have been the originator of this system. Because he was the man who was trying to do business without his money. So naturally, he had to borrow money from here and there. By the time the picture was complete he had to pay all these people. So he used to find some other buyer and sell it

outright for some money and pay them. I guess he is the man who introduced this system. Afterwards, the only distributor as such I think first people were the Royal Talkie distributors, Madurai. The second one was Shankar films Salem. The third was Devi films - they were producers who made this Kannada picture "Purandardasa" earlier. And only such people were the distributors then - Not many distributors were there..

03:13:09

Q: Vasana came and later settled as a distributor.

A: Vasana was introduced by Mr Subramanyam into films. Vasana by himself was not interested; he tried to finance some films to pay some propositions and people did not agree with him. Then Mr Subramanyam involved him in Tyaga Bhoomi.

03:13:32

Q: Talking of Mr Vasana, Mr Zaveri once told me in a very casual conversation that you and Zaveri and Vakil had something to do with him. Vasana was telling some great if's of history? If that had happened something else could have happened. Can you tell us something about it?

A: That is what we invited Mr S. TriMurthy and Mr S. Vasana to our studio. Both of them were invited and then T.R. Rajkumari was on the set. Mandharvati shooting was in process. That shooting we showed him that happened during the night.

03:14:12

Q: Were you shooting in only at night in those days as I heard from B N Reddy.

A: I had made arrangements to shoot during the day also because that particular Studio had one facility. The studio was not completely covered. It had only had asbestos sheets. Alternatively, Jiten Banerjee being a technician, he was using a cloth to filter the sunlight. He has used intermittent glass; there is no glass with wire draws inside thick glasses. So every alternative cement sheet had another glass. The entire roof was covered like that with cement sheets and glasses. So I made an alternative when I was shooting there. I got all the glasses painted black from inside. They became Opaque and we were able to shoot in the daytime with artificial lights.

03:15:16



ntai

Q: Another thing I wanted to ask you about this night shooting. When I did the book on Mr B N Reddy, I had an occasion to talk with C.V who was the hero of this Devatha. He told me in those days they used to shoot at Newtowne where most of B N Reddy's earlier films were made. They were only shooting at night and the practice was mostly to shoot at night. When I asked him what was the reason he said the sound equipment and their acoustics were not so well developed. So they wanted to have a noise-free atmosphere which was possible only at night. The traffic sounds, cars, carts, crows and all that should be avoided and he gave that as the reason why people preferred to shoot at night. He said we were not night birds as people thought of us. This technical problem was there and we didn't have the acoustics so well developed in those days like you have today.

A : That is not true. I will tell you what was the reason. No doubt they were shooting only at night. There were compulsions shot at night in Newtowne because the construction of the studio was like that. That Newtowne Studio was constructed without any walls. It was practically open on four sides. There was a compound wall all around campus but the floor never had a door. It is I who fixed the door in 194 - that was much later. Till then both the sides were open, open up nearly 14 feet wide and 14 feet in height.

03:17:04

Q: And why did they do that?

A : They couldn't afford these two - four technicians joined together and started a studio. The entire compound belonging to one Naidu was childless. He gave it on rent - minimum rent. They were charged probably hundred rupees or so for the month. The entire building and campus and all that was rented to S.Nagoo, Dinshaw, Jiten Banerjee and R Ramanathan. Only R Ramanathan was a man who was probably able to lay his hands in a 1000 Rupees at a time as he was a Chettiar. And all the rest were mere technicians who didn't had any existence then. These people wanted to start so with a minimum investment they made a studio. And prior to that person who acted actually constructed the studio for some other person. Dwarkanath is one from Mysore-Bangalore, Dwarkanath and on the same premises. Dwarkanath there was another cameraman and there was a recordist. I am not able to recollect that name. There four people joined together and started the studio over there. They produced Prameeliarjuniyamu with Sthanam Narsimha Rao, a famous stage artist. Yedaballi SuryaNarayanana and Sthanam Narasimha Rao played a role. They made a Telugu film there called Prameelarjuneeyam. And they completed the picture or something happened and their luck with charisma went away. So these people had taken over.

03:18:58

Q: So they did not go to Newtowne, there was already something there? By what name was it called Newtowne - no - This Prameelarjuneeyam Dwarkanath and others. Anyway -

A: I am not able to recollect.

03:19:11

Q: Now coming back to your Studio Satyamurthy and Vasam came there to visit shooting. What Shooting?

A: These people made a big show because T.R. Rajakumari was on the sets and you know both Satyamurthy and Vasam what they were. So naturally, they were very interested, they said. I feel what they said that night was totally a bluff. I was present when they were talking to Chandu Bhai Vakil. He was the man who said see I am making these pictures and I need your financial help and you step in now and that went on. Probably Vasam said just to please him he said, yes yes. I am in the queue of getting 30000 rupees. Then he gave the proposition, this proposition I know because I was absolutely present.

03:20:04

Q: What was the proposition?

A: And his proposition was to advance 30000 rupees. I have a bill for which he would nominate an artist he would use. His mode of payment would be 7000 rupees towards the publicity of Anand Vignanam which he owned. And 5000 rupees to the publicity of the Narada which he also owned. And he said the balance of the money he will pay by the day when and whenever the amount for shooting.

03:20:37

Q: He was prepared to make no cash for payment? Was that his idea?

A: That was his idea, that was his proposition and then he said if by the time the picture is complete still the remaining balance is to be paid I will pay in cash. This is the proposition he put forth and this Chandu Bhai Vakil though he was an agent man he was not such an intelligent man. He was a little loose actually. He thought that he was willing to give money but I was not convinced. After having knowledge about what Mr Narayanan and other people were doing about films I could very well realise that this is not workable. Tomorrow you will say you bring this office, M.K. Bhagat this and that where will you go? This problem is not at all workable but afterwards these people

went and watched him whenever he gave an appointment and met vasan several times. He said you come tomorrow, day after tomorrow and like that and for a week he went afterwards he got pissed and stopped.

03:21:39

Q: Was Vasan already a well-known person in Madras?

A: He was very well-known as a journalist not as a filmmaker not at all. Subramanyam got him into films by virtue of having him in Tyag Bhoomi. He got finance because of his Kalki story, which was published in Ananda Brigadam. For which the entire finance was done by Mr Vasu. The picture was a flop and it was banned. You know it was released in Gaiety. Then they said that this is anti-political and this and that. They issued notice to Gaiety which stopped running the picture. But the T.S.P.L.P Chidambaram Chettiar saw the board that till the court order is received by me I have a right to run the film. So he allowed people to watch it for free, the entire day this theatre was open. And he allowed all people to go and watch the film. By 6 o'clock the order came to him when he received the order he said alright stop the picture.

03:22:58

Q: So Vasan's proposition for your firm was not workable and then you rejected it. What was Satyamurthy's role in that? Why did he come?

A: He, because he was a politician. Chandu Bhai Vakil thought it's a great honour to invite Satyamurthy.

03:23:13

Q: He had no interest in business or cinema?

A: Nothing, He never showed any interest except he became the first president of the Film Chamber of Commerce.

03:23:22

Q: So he had some taste for films I suppose. But he was a stage actor -

A: Indu Srinivasan financed them for Chandralekha and Vasan never financed them. Indu Srinivasan has financed for other producers also. One by P.S.V. Iyer, unfortunately, Panju died, he was his editor. Krishnan Panju. P.S.V. Iyer was to produce a picture.

03:23:52

Q: What was that film?

A: Kausalya.

03:23:54

Q: Kausalya. Was it a mythological film or a social film?

A: Social film it was released in Gaiety. The film Contained - 50% of the film contained, The Hero starts (inaudible) and reaches Madras by car. The entire length is shown in the film.

03:24:11

Q: But what was the purpose of it?

A: That's what they thought filmmaking was.

03:24:15

Q: Who directed it?

A: P.S.V Iyer himself. Kausalya.... and Anand Brigadam wrote a review about it. In one page he gave the title Kausalya and in the middle, he made a square black patch. That's all that is credited to Kausalya.

03:24:43

Q: Very effective review. After Mandharvati what did you do? Your reach was over and you said you quit the place.

A: I joined as the freelance cameraman again with Mr Prakash.

03:24:55

Q: R. Prakash? So he was still active at that time?

A : R.Prakash, he produced two films. He produced Tara Sasankam with K.Pushpavalli.

03:25:03

Q: Rekha's mother?



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A: I don't know about that. I know Pushpavalli.

03:25:10

Q: Was she already a known face at that time? I think she acted even much earlier.

A: She acted in Vara Vikrayam.

03:25:18

Q: Vara Vikrayam and She made a name in that chal Mohan Ranga.

A: Chal Mohana Ranga was...

03:25:24

Q: Was it R.Prakash Chal Mohana Ranga? He didn't direct it?

A: No - this picture Tara Sasankam was directed by R Prakash in which the hero was one Ramachandran. He was a songster, Siri Babu was Brihaspati. The film was in Telugu. K. Shiva Rao who miserably died that fellow was one of the comedians. There is another Lanka Satyam; he was the first hero for R. Prakash's Telugu picture.

03:25:59

Q: He died some years back.

A: Long back - his elder brother also died. Lanka Satyam was also a comedian.

03:26:10

Q: Now this Tara Sasankam of R.Prakash...where was it made?

A: It was made in the Sundaram Sound Studio. All Indoor.

03:26:21

Q: Talking of the Tara Sasankam, did it have that oil bath scene in this version also?

A: We did have it but we did use a duplicate.

03:26:30

Q: Pushpavalli did not act in that particular scene?



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A : Pushpavalli was not asked to do that scene. By that time she was supposed to be a respectable lady. Her then husband's name was one Aacharya and he was a B.A.BL. Aacharya. He was a very handsome looking man, not an actor. He was owning a car and she used to come by car and go by car. That was a grant she had then. She was a very obedient artist as long as she was in the sets. She was absolutely obedient whatever she was asked to do she did but she never asked to do these scenes.

03:27:13

Q : Oil bath scene - the sensational oil bath scene. So you had a double to do that?

A : We had a double to do that.

03:27:20

Q : How was the picture received by the public?

A : In Andhra the picture had a miserable run because there were a lot of complaints about both photography and sound. Because as a cameraman with a lot of enthusiasm I used very heavy diffusion because she was a very beautiful lady and I thought to photograph a beautiful lady I must go too much. I used very heavy diffusions and when we saw rushes here it looked very lovely. But by then Andhra theatres were such that this diffusion and all that was so badly viewed there. There was a review saying the picture couldn't be seen, can't be heard.

03:28:15

Q : Now how did you carry out the diffusion in those days?

A : There were diffusers imported from Kodak. Even now you have the same diffusers empty, quarter, half and all that same thing was available then. That was the first time I used diffusers and when I saw rushes I was immensely pleased. But when I heard reports they said can't be seen, can't be heard.

03:28:44

Q : When was this made, Tara Sasankam?

A : Tara Sasankam was made in 1940. After that war interfered and all studios were closed. Sundaram studios was removed and all those equipment were moved to Coimbatore. Zaveri Studio was also moved to Thiruvannamalai, all equipment was moved, all packed up every picture. While pictures this entire city, everything probably you were not born in. Evacuation there was nobody we knew then such that

this damn Madras city does not belong to anybody. It became - I had to leave on that fateful day of 7th April 1942. Do you remember that they said Japan is bombed? I was sleeping in one Chetpet Valli in one of friend's Zaveri 's house upstairs that early morning. But we found it very difficult to get food. All the hotels were closed and our families were all sent to Tirupati.

03:29:59

Q: Were you married at that time?

A: No I was not. Bachelor. Then I couldn't get on so I also went back to Tirupati. My other friend with whom I was staying so close K.V. Prasad Kashinath and Prasad Rao, he is no more now. He went away to Andhra and afterwards he became a big services engineer there.

03:30:21

Q: After Tara Sasankam what happened?

A: He was a recordist for that. Prasad Rao

03:30:27

Q: After Tara Sasankam you went to Tirupati you did not make any films?

A: I came back and again I faced some unemployment for some time. After that I joined again. K.P. Varadacharya had called me in 1938.

03:30:40

Q: Who is this K.P. Varadacharya?

A: That is T.G.R's Katakam.

03:30:44

Q: T.G.Raghavacharya man was known as Acharya - lawyer turned filmmaker.

A: Mangamma's Acharya. He took me to Salem.

03:30:56

Q: Katakam - whose production was this?



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A: It was their production; K.P.V and Acharya financed by Soundarraj.

03:31:04

Q: Did it come under the Tamil Nadu theatres banner? No - I was told this katakam was based on Shakespeare's Cinnamon . By this Siri Kumari -

A: This is absolute cinnamon and nothing else.

03:31:14

Q: Oh it was a recopy of Cinnamon in Tamil?

A: It was an Indianised version.

03:31:20

Q: Indianised version. Surya Kumari was the heroine?

A: Heroine.

03:31:22

Q: And who played the Hero? Vijay Kumar from Madurai.

A: Vijay Kumar was the hero.

03:31:27

Q: He disappeared I think - he disappeared very soon from the films.

A: Naturally after that film why somebody would have stayed. Even the distributors had a very bitter experience. One, P.A.Karman, was the man who purchased the rights for National Pictures. Then Murugesan Gudiyatham was also from Geeta films. He also purchased rights and some other people from the South also had bitter experiences.

03:31:53

Q: What went wrong with that film?

A: Cinnamon was not liked by people at all. Then because that was a message where it was portrayed well. Then K.R.Ramachandran's comedy was rather more classical. And it was the - I think I should put into words Oscar Wilde. It was a comedy for serious people.

03:32:27

Q: Where was this picture made? Katakam?

A: In Modern Theatres. T.R.Sundaram's studio was hired while making this film. The studio had nothing to do with that. These people had all their finance. They had to hire furniture and all properties. In those days there was no system of this furniture hiring and all these decors were not available. They had brought the furniture from Bangalore.

03:32:54

Q: From Bangalore? Did they buy it or did they hire it?

A: Hired it. They hired and they brought it by lorry.

03:33:02

Q: And what were people in Madras doing? How were they managing for all these furniture and props?

A: Then this Nadmuni and company was the only one who was available. He was able to provide us with some chairs and all that. The other man was one Giri who was providing vessels, pot, utensils, brooms etc. Only these two people were available.

03:33:23

Q: There were no regular supplies available for furniture and other props. Like filmocrafts, decors and all these people. Now we have a system that was not into existence.

A: Then they did not know that there was a business like that.

03:33:38

Q: And in modern theatres when you made this Katakam you must have enough opportunities to know Mr P.R. Sundaram. Did you know him well at that time? Later, of course, you worked for him. Earlier did you know him?

A: I knew him as the boss of this studio. He was a very reserved man then. It came as an instance there. I was employed by only T.G. Raghavacharya, where I was supposed to

work only for Katakam. I had nothing else to do with the other productions but there was one film by name Kundalakesi which was directed by Boman Irani.

03:34:26

Q: Is this film in which K.L.V. Vasantha acted?

A : Exactly, I am coming to that. K.L.V. Vasantha was the heroine in that film. Kundalakesi was produced by Central Studios Coimbatore. During the recess period, she became the mistress of Sundaram so she never wanted to go elsewhere beyond that studio. It was in progress they had to complete a few sets and she wouldn't give call sheets. She said, 'If you want to shoot you come here and shoot at Modern Theatres Salem'. As a concession, Mr Sundaram was willing to give them sets for free. They wanted a pond set and another small set. There were only two sets. In pond set, there was a song to be picturised in Kundalakesi. It was a solo song sung by K.L.V. Vasantha. And there was another small scene in which some other minor artists appeared. I was working for Katakam. Boman Irani was known to me in Calcutta as I had worked under him. When he saw me there he said, Krishna you are here, I said yes I am working here. Then it is very good you work for my picture Kundalakesi. I said I can't do that because I am working for a producer. I have nothing to do with this studio. If you want my services then you have to ask two people one is the studio owner and the other is the producer. I hope those people will not have any objections because if you are shooting we will not have any shooting.

03:36:17

Q: There was only one floor at that time?

A: There were three floors but there were only two pieces of equipment. So there won't be any difficulty for the producer for whom I was working. But you must obtain permission from Mr Sundaram as he may not like it. Then he went and approached Sundaram.

03:36:40

Q: Who was the cameraman for Kundalakesi at that time? Boman Irani was directing the picture.

A: Directing the picture I think in Salem Mastan was working as a cameraman.

03:36:49

Q: So what happened? He approached Sundaram, did he?

A: He approached Sundaram and Sundaram said it is their call, you find out with those Katakam people. He said if those people have no objection I have no objection and he can work. So fortunately, it took two days to complete the work. I did those two scenes for Kundalakesi. Those rushes were projected there. K.L.V. Vasantha and Sundaram all of them saw it. Then K.L.V. Vasantha insisted that I should be the cameraman for the next picture she is going to work on.

03:37:33

Q: What was that?

A: Sati Sulochana.

03:37:36

Q: Sati Sulochana of Modern Theatres?

A : Modern theatres in which T.R.Sundaram was the hero. He played Inderjeet for which he already fixed the cameraman by name Krishnaiyya who was working on a 1000 rupees salary.

03:37:53

Q: He was a well-known cameraman?

A : He was not that well-known. He was working there in modern theatres so people needed him and he came there as a cameraman. Salaries were given according to circumstances.

03:38:08

Q : This Kundalakesi - striking a personal note. The producer of the film was one K Srinivasan. Do you remember that name? He was a very distant relative of mine. I did not know that. I was too small a boy and I happened to see this Kundalakesi as a kid because of this relationship

A: Srinivasan - for which, I can provide you with a person who knows more about him.

Rangarajan, he is some secretary or something like that in the film federation. He is an M.A.; he is a journalist, he was with Srinivasan. He was all in all with Srinivasan and he was a production manager for that picture. Also for Kundalakesi - Mr Rangaraj.

03:39:00

Q: That Kundalakesi I remember for two reasons. One that I saw was the film privately projected by Srinivasan for his relatives and friends. The other perhaps is a little more interesting because you can't properly remember a particular scene. There are very few shots of K.L.V. Vasantha in which a teenager could be seen. I don't remember it. We were also so small, I was interested so much.

A: No no no, I used to be a very very very strict as far as sex is concerned for which we will talk about it later.

03:39:34

Q: I know we guys need to be on the tape because we want to know about the state of sex appeal in those days.

A: I objected to the change - I objected to these sort of sex scenes as a cameraman in spite of being working under a boss. When K.L.V. Vasantha came to sets with a particular dress in Sati Sulochana. And T.R.Sundaram was already made up as Indrajeet; it was mythology. So you know mythology dresses all these. They had one strip here and then one pard in there and all that. There were no underwears, and she came to the set. I found it was very vulgar, very nasty to produce that. Then I said "What sir? Where is the dress? Like this only. I asked this to Sundaram - why - is it not looking nice? - I said - What is nice in that sir - then he asked what is not nice? - If she changed the dress it would be better. Sundaram asked why? Why should it be so? - What needs to be changed." Then I didn't want to waste time. Then I saw a backlight. I called the Electrician and asked him to switch on that light. Once it was switched on she was ashamed. Then she was asked to go and shave. She was asked to wear underwear and come. She went to change the dress. That much courage I had. I refused to do anything Vulgar. I could go to another instance, I had refused C.V. Raman taking an obscene scene, fork garden in Salem.

03:41:49

Q: Which film was that?

A: That was Anand Ashram.

03:41:52

Q: What was the Scene?

A : It was the fight scene between 4 men and 3 women. They all started fighting and jumped into the water inside a Swimming pool. These women were wearing langa and their clothes went off the way and to see them all naked was so very nasty. Then I simply switched off the camera. Then I asked “what is this, sir? It is looking very awkward”. He replied ”You don’t worry“.I simply switched off my camera,took my coat and walked home. Simply walked home from the outdoor location. That was our attitude for our self success.

03:42:53

Q: This Kundalakesi, G.M. Basheer - I think he was the villain? I remember some of the shots.

A: I know Basheer.

03:43:02

Q: That picture is very green in my memory. After Kundalakesi what happened? You finished Katakam - were partly on Kundalakesi and you stayed on?

A : After Kundalakesi, Mr Sundaram called me as he needed my services for Sati Sulochana . Then he offered me a job where I quoted him my terms. Then I said, I should be the chief of the department. Krishnayya was working there. He was made as associate director for him.

03:43:32

Q: Who directed that film? Sundaram himself?

A : Sundaram himself directed and played the Hero. Then I said unless I was made chief of the department I am not willing to take the project. Then he said yes, I was taken as cameraman chief of department on 650 Rupees salary in 1938, 1943.

03:44:07

Q: So you lived in Salem during that period?

A: I lived in Salem from 43 to 46. For three years I have worked on all the pictures that were directed by Sundaram.

03:44:16

Q: This Satisulochana was Indrajeet's story. Indrajeet was Ravana's son. Probably that was a personal story of Inderjeet who wrote the script and dialogues?

A: Dialogues were written by Bharati Das, Pondicherry writer. He wrote high plonga Tamil and afterwards there wrote one P.Kannan from Jalaganda. He was one of the sub-editors or so for Chandamaridhi. You know Sundaram was running a magazine called Chandamaridhi in which Kannadasan Suranivasanam worked. He was also working there so that man was asked to correct Bharathi dasan's Tamil. He asked what sort of Tamil was that? I was unable to understand the Dialogue.

03:45:13

Q: You were telling me some years back, I recall how Sundaram found it difficult to pronounce some of the dialogue written by Bharathidasan?

A: Yes he could not pronounce it. That's why he Said "What type of Tamil is this?" And from that, I picked one idea which I used in Thookku Thookki. He is the man who wrote a very big scene inside Isai and Nadakam.

03:45:37

Q: Eyal, Isai, Nadakam. The Three tamil - the three prominent Tamilan features.

A: He made a very big scene. It was supposed to be dance sequence. He made a very interesting scene for Satisulochana and that was scrapped. In some places, the dialogues were edited. That Dancing Scene "Kurangi erunthu piranthavan Manithan" before that in Eyal, isai and Nadakam that was eyal- Prose. I used Varana maeram then isai and Nadakam.

03:45:24

Q: Eyal, isai, nadakam. The three parts of Tamil languages?

A: I gave this idea to Mr udumalai Narayanan Kavi and he said yes. Eyal, isai, nadakam we will use it in an easy way of understanding...

03.46.36

Q: And I also recall you telling me some years back about shooting some close-ups of T R Sundaram? Can you tell us about that? Quite interesting I remember it very well? And how he used to bend his head which used to go out of frame

A: That, his nature was whenever he used to talk he used to tilt his head.

03:46:54

Q: That is some kind of mannerism?

A: That was not the mannerism. He was always like that. While walking also he used to tilt his head. He could never keep his head straight. That was his Nature. And I have seen it, he said - "Go for 100 and take the shot, a very tight close shot". In those days directors used to take great pride in calling length by focal length because everybody can't use that terminology or understand the same. If we kept it as 75, we could not cover him. From head to shoulder we had to cover him in 100. 100 was enough to cover him totally. We will be capturing the crown and other areas. And if we compose all it will be just for the shoulders only. If he tilts the head half of his head it will be outside the frame. "100 Frame Ready sir - and the dialogue he was about to speak - Steadily as the frame is full. As it is a full frame, I was showing the coverage part and lower end of the frame - as I should not cut the top and keep the angle as top angle - Ready - The dialogue was very small "if so...", as it was a questioning sequence and he started shaking his head. Once the shot was complete, he asked "is it ok?" - and I said "Your head is moving here and there sir - We can't access the camera like that". If you tilt the head from the beginning of the dialogue, we can't capture it. He was unable to act without shaking his head. Not only was it a stiff neck but it was acting like that. Then I had to change the Camera Lens. I asked him. He suddenly replied, "Why I won't act for this Lens?" It went on for 7 to 8 takes, still the head was going out - And he was very confidently telling me that it would be ok and it was correct. Then I replied if it is correct for you then what can I say for that. After that T.R. Sundaresh was told to print all the takes - 7 pages and the next day we went to watch the rush. Rush means you had to go to Modern Theatre only. You can't beat that with any other theatre for rushes. We used to shoot this in the evening and go home the next morning. You come at 8 o'clock and see that the rushes were ready in the projector.

03:50:50

Q: Like the Hollywood system?

A: Whatever it was called. That is the only place where I have seen this.

03:50:56

Q: So Systematically they were doing certain things?



ntai

A : Before us seeing the morning show he saw it first and he told me to go and see the rush for implication. If he approved it and if I had any complaints then I have to say, I argue. Then he came and sat on the seat for the show. The picture needs to start at the moment when he sits on the chair. If not, the operator would face the fire.

03:51:49

Q : He had to Naturally move very fast.

A : Very Strict on that. There were certain things which most people should learn from him. He came and sat; it was just the beginning of my career over there. I was also sitting there, I kept quiet. It was very English systematic in seating. Seats were allocated for the Art Director, Cameraman, Assistant Director, last seat for the lab - our man. If he doesn't come that seat would be empty. This side is the last seat for Art Director. And he will be sitting in the middle as Director. Once these people were allowed to sit and no other artists were allowed to sit. This was the first type. Second, once we were doing one scene, he took too many takes. He got my opinion. Then he came out of the room and said that I can act and he admitted his limitation as an actor. If you could have told this before I could have taken in some other angle. He called up Sundaresh and asked if that costume was available till tomorrow to use it for shooting the same scene again. He was a very sportive man and others should have the courage to stand in front of him. You must know how to handle him. Next day he came for the first shoot with that dress. I fixed 75mm lenses and adjusted the camera in such a manner that instead of straight on his passport size frame. I confirmed if the frame composition is not altered even if he tilts his head. He asked me that I was doing the same thing as yesterday. How come the shot got ok? I said "watch this in the movie you will feel the difference". You should have that much guts to say in front of him. I know for sure of your position you will see the difference tomorrow in the scene. Particularly for that scene, he installed two leaders and he looped for that particular shot. See his interest in that first. He called the operator to loop that scene to see it for a number of times. In this scene also, I have tilted the head? I replied but it does not look that awkward.

03:56:30

Q : The boss of modern theatres who had made so many pictures in so many languages. Can you tell us something more about this man? His personality, his nature, what type of person he was? Because there are so many stories about him that I have heard from so many people.

A : To begin about this man I must tell you that the best technician under whom I worked all my life was Mr K.R. Sundaram.

03:56:48

Q: You rate him so high? As a man who appreciates films?

A: I rate him so highly as an individual, as a person, as a human being, as a man who is fit to be a person at top of the helm of his affair. And he was very certain about what he did. And he appreciated anything that was good; such a great man. He appreciated the truth but he didn't like the falseness. Whenever he found people were trying to take advantage of him, he was the worst tyrant. That's why people thought that he was the tyrant.

3:58:12

Q: Many people told me that he was a bit of a tyrant and a very difficult man to get on with?

A: In fact, he was not a tyrant. On the other hand, he was a very kind-hearted man. He was only showing himself from the exterior to control these people. Because all of them were very unsystematic people whereas he was a 100% systematic man. We had never seen Mr Sundaram coming to the studio even one minute late. You call it punctual or must be his habit. At 7.15 in the morning you would find him dressed up and trimmed. One particular fashion about him was with ties. If he wears a tie on one day you could not see for one more year.

03:58:16

Q: So he used to come wearing a tie to the studio? like a westerner?

A: He always used to wear it. As far as I know he used to wear one silk shirt, silk pants and tie all the time. Whatever it is he liked it. He was a very well dressed man. He used to come at 7:15 and go around the entire studio from the carpenter set and examine a few other places. By 8:30 he was present. By the time technicians arrived he would see previous days' work by himself. Then he used to watch the rushes for the second time and then watched it along with technicians.

03:58:58

Q: So he saw it twice in every morning? He was a very thorough person?

A: He was a very very thorough person and he expected everyone to be like him. That's where people were mistaken. But when he committed a fault and if another man had any

courage to find out the fault. He was prepared to call a day if he felt whatever another said was right.

03:59:24

Q: He was such a broad-minded man..

A: He was a very broad-minded man. I will give you an instance which may be a super place for general talk. We were doing some shot in Sati Sulochana, in which he was the hero and Ms. K.L.V Vasantha was the heroine. Krishnayya was an Associate Director. He was also recognised as a Cameraman and Sundaram was the Director. So he wanted another man to Associate along with krishnayya. Krishnayya was trying to guide me to place the camera. And I never bothered, I said, it's alright if you want to place the camera over there I can place it over. There was a particular shot which was in a corridor. From the corridor, you have to turn to the right and go to Shimhasana - that was Ravana Shimhasana. The corridor was on the right side of Simhasana and he had to enter through the door towards the corridor, carry the heroine and walk along the corridor then sit on the Simhasana. I was asked by Krishnayya to place the camera in front of the corridor through which he was supposed to enter. Half of the heart I felt that was wrong. So I said you make it a chalk mark.

04:01:03

Q: So he wanted you to do a steady shot?

A: Not even steady. I will tell where the difficulty arises in that. This is a particular thing you should also know. I said you make a chalk mark for the camera position and asked him to place the camera there. I asked, "What lens do you want to use?" He said 35 mm. Start the camera. Sundaram came there carrying the heroin. As he walked, we had to pan and go up to the Simhasana then we positioned the camera over there. By nature, when you use a 35 mm lens with a camera and do fast panning there will be a drop of the shot. That was one first mistake, second mistake was it becomes more than 180 degrees of your working. Pan shot was complete. Next shot he called. Then I went to Sundaram and requested him, Sir, can we do this shot once more for my satisfaction? He questioned, why again for you? I prefer to change the camera position and shoot to which he agreed. He never spoke and said alright. Then I placed the camera at a 45-degree angle and allowed him to pass this side. Panned smooth along with Simhasana. Then we carried out the remaining shoot. The next day we were seeing rushes. When we saw the rushes the shots were taken, the first shot came as he entered it looked like the camera was also returning back. Sundaram shouted, Hey, what happened, something went wrong? I said nothing went wrong. It would appear like that on screen. Then I played the second shot. It appeared very well. He said, "You

should have told me that time itself?" I replied, you just meet twice in a day. That shows man's character of goodness. What you say is right and was correct then he used to appreciate your work. He was not prepared to be fooled. People mistook him by saying that he was a very tyrant and all he was never at all tyrant. He was a tyrant for the people whom he had to be.

04:04:14

Q : But I heard some people saying that he had a habit of beating artists and his assistant. For himself it was - Muktha Srinivasan once said that he was beaten by K.R, Sundaram on the set.

A : Yes he was asked to do a type of work. He asked to bring the hunter. Once he found what he thought was right he was prepared to do anything, nobody could stop him. He never cared what happened. And you do not have the power to cross the producer who produced the film. Certain comments were made on that film.

04:05:02

Q: Which film was that?

A: That is a film titled Digambara Samiyar. Boman Irani was made Director over there and he connected with some artists. G.Sakuntala was selected as heroine and she was recognized by Ellis Duncan who directed Poonmudi over there. He had his own personal interest in her and so he was recommending her to be heroin. I was the chief cameraman for Digambara Samiyar because Boman Irani was not aware about the language. Sundaram made me help them as they were knowing Tamil. First objection was that the heroin G. Sakuntala will not withstand. Beautiful looks were not enough for the picture she had to carry the role. Next, he called Poonmudi and asked why don't you cast her in your film instead of Maduri Devi? Yes yes, I can cast her. He got convinced. I told him to cast her in that picture and He did cast her. Then this set of artists arrived there and every day they used to shoot. Every day we were shooting and seeing rushes after the shoot. Sundaram never interfered in our shooting. He never came and saw any rushes or anything. These 4000 feet of the Digambara Samiyar. By chance, he met me and asked me: "How was the film proceeding?" I said nothing is on track. Then he asked: What Mistake did you find? I said straight away to him, "There is a mistake in the entire film". He didn't speak anything. Next day he called for a projection and he called all distribution officers to his studio. There were about 18 officers working under him. Sundaram told everybody who was nearby to arrive at the studio by 4 'o clock. Digambara Samiyar was released on projection. Everybody was provided with a slip. Everybody had to write the review on the paper and put it into the secret box. After saying that he went out. Including Muktha Srinivasan

everybody watched the movie. He was one of the assistants - Boman Irani's assistant. Everybody wrote their own review. Everybody anonymously rejected the heroine G.Sakuntala. She was not suited for this role. She was not looking nice. The makeup was not looking good on her. Next day the man Sundaram comes and scraps the entire 4000 edited feet of film. It was completely scrapped and all new artists were casted. The script was rewritten and redirected by Mr Sundaram.

04:09:06

Q: So Irani was removed? Coming back to Sati Sulochana. After Sati Sulochana, what were the films you worked with Sundaram?

A: I did two films with T.R. Mahalingam, Aadithiyam Kanavu and Maayavathi. Anjali Devi and T.R. Mahalingam.

04:09:40

Q: This Aadithiyam Kanavu, was in 1001 in that palkova making?.

A: That film did not make much money.

04:09:52

Q: Was it a successful film?

A: Every film is a successful film as far as monetary reasons are concerned because they never lost money.

04:10:01

Q: Who directed this Adithya Kanavu? Sundaram?

A: Mr Sundaram directed all the pictures. As long as I was there, I was working for Mr Sundaram.

04:10:11

Q: This Adithyan Kanavu - In those days they used to say it was a very sexy movie?

A: There was only one swimming scene of Anjali Devi for which we constructed a swimming pool inside the floor. I gave her a piece of cloth. By the time half of the scene was over, that Dam burst. It was just constructed for an underwater shot.

04:10:40

Q: Did they shoot an underwater shot in Adithya Kanavu?

A: I don't remember.

04:10:48

Q: What happened? The pressure was too much in the glass and it broke. The glass was not sufficiently secret supposed.

A: It broke.

04:10:55

Q : Can you tell us something about the making of this Adithya Kanavu and Mayavanthi? Some of your Experiences which you may be able to remember -

A : It was quite an ordinary movie. He took a long time to do the same. The greatest experience I had was making 1000 Thalaivangi Apoorva Chintamani. I was the cameraman and I tried very very hard. Because that was the picture in which I took very great interest. Every day they used me for one full close-set. No Other studio could have constructed a set like that for such a picture. There were mainly 48 (inaudible) in that film; probably any other producer would have converted 32 small (inaudible). The scene was demanding such a set. But he took it another way and made a very spectacular film set because he saw it as a very big picture.

04:12:00

Q: The film was also very long wasn't it?

A: Very Very long. It was almost 4 hrs and 45 minutes in length. Afterwards, it was cut into 1000 feet probably now it is about 18,000 feet. It was re-released, we had Maduri Devi, Ramiah, Varalakshmi, T. S. Govindan , Mahalingan and all. T S Govindan was the hero because Mahalingam troubled us in that film. He should have been the hero in Madhur Chintamani also. We gave call sheets, shooting was fixed, all the artists were made up, the car was sent to the station, Mahalingam did not turn up from Madras. Then the car returned. Sundaram Sir cancelled the shooting and later made T. S. Govindan as the hero. That is how T S Govindan became the hero of that picture. He sang some melodious songs in it. G.Ramanathan was the music director.

04:13:21

Q: G.Ramanathan, Was he the permanent Music Director for K.R.Sundaram.?



ntai

A : No no. Actually, G.Ramanathan was recommended by me. Formerly he was working with so many other people. Kalyanam, this K.Mahadevan for some time than I said Rama is a good music director. I recommended these two people to Sundaram.

04:13:46

Q: How did you know G.Ramanathan? Was he already in the films as a music director or?

A : Through K.P. Rangachari. He came to be known as a music director for them - for Katakam.

04:13:57

Q: So he was already a known music director?

A : He was next to Hirananda.

04:14:07

Q: Who was the most popular music director in those days? Katam, Kalyanam or S P Venkataraman.

A : S.P Venkat Raman was never popular. He was recommended by M.S Subbulakshmi and for her sake, they had taken him. He was never a popular music director. There was no popular music director as such. Still, G Ramanathan came and became popular because of M.K. Vardhiala.

04:14:39

Q: How did that come about?

A : Ramanadhan was music director for Thyagaraja. It was a Ramanadhan's songs that Thyagaraja sung. Ramanadhan was a person who went on singing singing singing along with him all the time. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar always used to listen to G. Ramanadhan's songs. He used to listen to his songs and sing them. He also sang them so many times after understanding, digesting and then producing the song.

04:15:28

Q: So - Thyagaraja Bhagavathar famous songs in Haridas.

A : All famous songs are composed by G. Ramanathan only. That is the very reason I booked him for Thooku Thhooki. And he challenged that he would excel this K

Soundararajan's beats which seemed to be useless. He gave us this guarantee because he did not conduct the music over there. TM Soundararajan or Someone had sung half the song. Did you send him?

04:16:04

Q: K.R. Sundaram didn't like him?

A: He didn't like him. He was sent away from there. Then Ramanathan and Marutha kasi told me. Marutha Kasi was reminded because we were in need of a male singer. So only P.T.Rajanatha's brother loganathan was present over there.

04:16:25

Q: Thirchy Loganathan is his brother? I did not know that.

A: Yes. He is a brother or son in law. He was the only famous singer for him. Before that his Karunanidi uncle, P.S. Jayaraman. P.S.Jayaraman and P.S.Govindan all were younger. Leelavathi Sulochana is the name of the film in which Govindan and Jayaraman were the actors.

04:16:58

Q: Leelavathi Sulochana is the name of the film?

A: Leelavathi Sulochana is the name of the film in which they had 60 songs around the party. They both were singers from the stage. Uthaiyama Nagarthil, Chinapillai; these all were from the stage. There were other people from the stage. The stage adds value. Jayaraman and T.R. Mahalingam, they all were listening for knowledge purposes. They were not aware about scientific knowledge of music.

4:17:47

Q: They used to sing only by listening?

A: Yes. Nandakumar was there. He used to give them apples, cameras, etc and made them sing.

04:17:55

Q: This Mayavathi I remember seeing it again as a school boy. That film also contained what was known as very erotic visuals.



ntai

A : There were no erotic visuals at all except the villain who had (inaudible). He is almost like it is there from. He used to read quran, and there was some peculiar note...they loved each other. There was no erotic scenes at all. On the other hand, as long as all cameraman did not allow any direct people when this was shot was carried out there, even Mr Sundaram.

04:18:36

Q : In this Adithan Kanavu I wrote about this in one of the Bombay based film publications while writing about a series on South Indian film some two-three years back. There is a character which was played by his S.V Subbaya who was Baba Kalai's Baba. In Mayawati where he is looking at her it becomes fixed.

A : That is in Mayawati not in Adithan Kanavu.

04:19:12

Q : Was that all inspired from the Western films?

A : Western film. Actually, I brought that technology to Madras. Here there is one dentist by the name of Freeman, do you remember? I made dental attachments to him to make protruding teeth. And on the nose with the help knife, bandages and all that make up an artificial nose was fixed.

04:19:46

Q : Because Mayawati. I do not think it was a success so far as Karunadhawari.

A : In those days people were inclined towards all erotic comedy scenes, erotic dialogues. If you said sex in spoken form through dialogues.

04:20:05

Q : Can you recall some instances of such?

A : Every film had this. For instance I tell you there was one song from Madurai Veeran which was produced earlier. What was it, a song line, "Alana Aru Masam Machane".

04:20:43

Q : But people did not object to it? Was it based on western culture film or?

A : They relished it. That's how our songs were perceived by everybody.

04:20:59

Q: Sanjay Ramadas.

A: Sanjay Ramadas. Even if he used to open his mouth he used to speak about it. He would understand the taste of the people.

04:21:14

Q: He didn't know much of Tamil. He was a Tamil Pandit you told me once.

A: He was a Tamil teacher. I came to know about him and it is I who got him to Madras. He came to write Mariammam - the film which was directed by L.S. Ramachandran. It was released in Salem. At that time only he came to know about this DJR character. Salem, Sidiannam you know (inaudible). Sidiannam was more popular over there in Salem. He was the right hand of EKR. He was manufacturing cloth. He had a brother by the name Sankara. These people came together and planned to make the film Mariammam. He asked me what story was it about? Everybody came there along with Sanjay Ramdas. And after that, it was a partnership by Sundaram. He used to write and I saw that it was impossible to correct it? That's alright, let him write anything. He then caught hold of extra women over there, his second wife. She was working on a 20 rupees monthly salary as extras. Modern Theatres paid monthly salaries to some extras which was a type of full-time employment.

04:22:53

Q: Were there any other artists who were on full time? Because Modern Theatres pictures had almost the same people who used to appear in almost every film.

A: This all these were prompted naturally, this, for instance Oak Devar, Saroja, Mrs. Thangavelu, ezhumalai. A. Karunanidhi, Comedian Madhavan.

04:23:17

Q: They used to come in almost every Film of T.R.Sundaram.

A: Everybody got a monthly salary and daily lunch in the studio.

04:23:25

Q: I believe he had a system running like a hostel. Oil for bathing every Saturday or Sunday?

A: That's what M.A. Venu in charge of that hostel was asked to do. He was a manager for that lot. Everybody, except the heroine, everybody else had worked over there.

04:24:02

Q: Some say that they were very strict about these measures and sometimes this Sundaram used to come with torch light at nights to see what was happening. Was he a very strict person almost like a hostel warden?

A: He was not staying next to the hostel.

04:24:20

Q: He was not living in a Yercaud while he had a house?

A: He gave that Yercaud to Vasanta in later days.

04:24:29

Q: Oh I see.

A: He was going to yercaud only on Sundays. Saturday night he would go there. Sunday he used to stay there as she was living here. One English woman was staying with her in yercaud. Her name was Glydis.

04:24:51

Q: And then there is something about this Digambara Samiyar. This was earlier to Apoorva Chinthamani or later?

A: Later.

04:25:00

Q: This Apoorva Chintamani is again based on folklore. Was it made as a film earlier?

A: It is a folklore subject. It was only a book.

04:25:13

Q: And I remember something like a Montage.

A: The series was in book format.

04:25:19

Q: Yes, I have seen that book and especially the number coming up as pages kept on rolling 129. I remember those shots. I saw it again as a school boy and remember it as a kid. That is all your work. And it had all artists like M.R. Swaminathan and he was the main villain I think who played that Mannargudi.

A: M.R. Swami was the main villain in Mannargudi.

04:25:39

Q: I think it was a very successful film wasn't it? Apoorva Chintamani

A: Yes. It was.

04:25:44

Q: And after Apoorva Chintamani came this -

A: Mayawati and Anandam. Digambara Samiyar was the last picture after those films.

04:25:54

Q: Digambara Samiyar is a novel by Vadavoor K DuruSwami Iyengar. It is something like a detective story. I did not see that picture.

A: It is a detective story it was on the - the climax was a very peculiar system. To make a man speak the truth you tease him to such an extent. Do not allow him to take rest for at least 36 hours or 48 hours without taking sleep or rest.

04:26:25

Q: Those methods are used even today in western countries. Second-degree third-degree whatever they call it as?

A: Third-degree method. They used to treat him in that manner.

04:26:37

Q: What was the story of this Digambara Samiyar? What is this Digambara samiyar? Who was he?

A: Digambara samiyar is various ways - you find the character by putting on makeup (Vesham).

04:26:47

Q: He is the detective. That role was played by M.N. Nambiar

A: Originally by Kaliya's son who died later. Then M.N. Nambiar played the role.

04:26:54

Q: So it was re-shot with M N Nambiar in those scenes. So he is the man who sets out to find some murder. Was there a murder in that film?

A: Yes there was.

04:27:02

Q: Who gets murdered?

A: I don't remember.

04:27:06

Q: And he goes to a number of disguises and finds out.

A: And finds out - And finds to corroborate the evidence he brings that man who is the lawyer - Kumbakonam lawyer. They bring him there for four days and make him speak and ask him who all suffered because of him. And provide food for him and we ask him whether he knows this person he would say yes I know.

04:27:45

Q: Who was the heroine in Digambara samiyar?

A: Girija.

04:27:48

Q: This is after G.Shakuntala was removed

A: It is not in Digambara Samiyar it seems.

04:27:53

Q: You said 4000 feet were scrapped.



ntai

A: Yes I think so. I do not remember that.

04:27:57

Q: D N Janaki was the heroin of Digambara samiyar?

A: That is Apoorva Chintamani.

04:28:01

Q: In Digambara samiyar who was the heroine?

A: R.Shakuntala.

04:28:07

Q: Not M.S.Draupadi?

A: No Somebody else.

04:28:11

Q: You do not remember who the heroin was? Did you do the complete picture?

A: No I came back by then.

04:28:15

Q: What made you come out?

A: That was a very silly matter. Mr Sundaram at a mark on the set said that look here Krishnaswamy I would like to get four day's work in one day. I was very hardworking and very sincere. I will direct even now if I take up a project. Those days I used to have work and nothing else, no other hobby. It is quite embarrassing when he said four days work in one day. I was a very fast worker as a cameraman. Then he settled and he took me out. I said it is simple arithmetic sir four days of work will take four days. Probably this was the embarrassment I should not have told that simple arithmetic thing. But I was quite angry, rather very rude also which I didn't realise. I did say that this. Then office was made up. He became all red in his face. No that's not what I said see those fellows, nobody works properly. They are your servants and if they are working under your nose and if you have no control over them what can I do? You must complain. I never complain about anybody. If I am not able to control a man I will go away or I will send him out I won't complain. He walked out of the set. This is discipline. After 15

minutes M.A.Venu came. He said that the master has got angry at you. And I asked why? What is the reason? He replied you spoke something wrong to him. I replied why only he can speak and not us? He said sir why don't you do some adjustment. I replied to him see don't speak to him about this adjustment . I can also get as angry as he gets. Go and tell him. He said he wants to cancel the shooting. I said I don't know about it and I went in very fast. I was wearing all this coat then I was used to being thin. My condition when I joined there was I should be picked up by car and dropped by car at my house.

04:31:05

Q: So you had you were living in a house then in Salem? He gave you a house.

A: He gave me a house. After that incident they had a discussion between them. I don't know much about that. It was about a 6:30-7 o'clock evening schedule. Then I was dropped there. When I reached there I immediately decided that I am not going to work here anymore. Those days you had to get a train at 10 o'clock to go to the junction. There was one town station in Salem,.. Then I was married. I told my wife that I would come back in one or two days. And on that day I purchased the ticket and came to Madras. Even before that, I had an offer from Tharakam and Ramaiyya to come and join over there. One of my friends Mr Radha Krishna Swamy had already joined there and he was working there who later on became my partner. I came straight to Allandur, it came via Virudhachalam. In Tambaram, I changed the dress and went straight to Triplicane. He asked, what happened? Every Sunday he used to come. I told him everything. He said this is the matter, come let's go. I asked him where? To Swamy. I said I already went there. He doesn't have any work and all. I am visiting them daily morning and evening. There is no work over there. Suggest me some place where I can get work. Is that so? Then Shankar Reddy was making a film. He was in need of a cameraman it seems. He said. Ok let's go to meet him and we both went.

04:33:01

Q: Shankar Reddy was then staying on coats Road?

A: Coats Road he was making his first picture, not Lavakusha. Y.V.Rao was Director

04:33:13

Q: What was that film?

A: The story was normal one Ramana Reddy's first picture.Y V Rao was the director. Mr krishnasamy was talking about this cameraman who has resigned from Modern theatres. We had a conversation in Telugu. He used to speak like the people like in

Nellore. In Telugu he said, He was working in Modern Theatres and he knew everything and he resigned from there. At Present he doesn't have a job. Do u have any job over here, if not tell us else we will leave that place. He replied we can recruit him here. Y.V. Rao said Maanavathi is the title of the film. We are planning to make it in two languages. We will have a contract. I was not sure about the contract. What is this contract and all? You will be paying me a salary, right? No sir we will have a contract for 6 months. Then I did a mental calculation.

04:34:53

Q: So you calculated at the rate of 650?

A: 3600 rupees. And he was saying it is just for two films. One day it will be 650. He asked shall we put that in contract and I said ok we will proceed.

04:35:14

Q: Who said that? Did you tell him? 15000 for 9 months

A: Yes let us have 15,000 Rs for 9 months. I needed that job. I immediately got a letter typed as an appointment letter. He gave me a cheque of thousand rupees and put it in my pocket. I came back to Salem. We shifted the things and vessels in TVS logistics. By 3 O'clock I was sending all my pieces of luggage by putting them into the lorry. Venu and our assistant Sadaiaddi, Sadaiappan and our first assistant arrived. He came and said Venu sir is calling you. And asked again who? I won't come for any sir. Ask him to come here and speak if he needs to. Venu was thinking he was a big shot. He thought he was next to Sundaram. Venu took the car and the letter which said you have absented yourself from the shooting without information so your service was terminated forthwith and leave off that you are paid two months salary as notice. They had very very wonderfully done that. I didn't know how to go and thank Sundaram. I borrowed 2000 rupees for marriage purposes in 1948 when she was working in Modern Theatres. I borrowed 2000 rupees saying I will be paying hundred rupees per month. 1400 balance was remaining. Three-month salary is given in lieu as notice and 1400 due was written off. And you are asked to send the stamped receipt for this. I was touched very much. I was touched by the writing of that 1400 simply. I signed and gave that letter to Venu. I got the money in cash. What sir? He was speaking to himself. The things are being put inside the lorry. You are getting angrier than Sundaram. I said I am going to my town tonight. You know it, sir? What do you know if he didn't say no then also I would have gone to my town.

04:38:49

Q: You remember you once told me about some stool or chair while shooting. Can you tell me about that incident that's quite interesting? He never liked others to sit on that chair right he was very feudal?

A: That's what these people thought of him. They made practice on the floor that he was having all issues of a smoker. He was a chain-smoker. He used to have a chair, next to that chair there used to be a teapoy. On that teapoy there was an ashtray and a glass of water covered with some cloth. Every half an hour he would sip some water and every 2 minutes he would smoke a cigarette. He would smoke a cigarette and half of it he would put in Bin. Sipping a little water again, smoking a cigarette that's what he did. And somehow I don't know who practised it on set. In his presence, I didn't see anybody sitting, not even an artist, not even Hero. Even the hero heroine nobody had anything. There never used to be any other furniture on the floor. The floor had no other furniture except those set furniture and his chair. I saw this for a long time. I was working for Katakam then this very first day when I was appointed as a chief of the department. I called in for a requisition book and I wrote an urgent note with the date. One teak wood stool of two feet, four and a half inches height. He may have thought it was required for other reasons as the stool height was two and a half inches height. Like a tripod and three legs, circular top of sixteen and a half inches round radius. My intention was if it is a four feet height means the light man can easily get down and he won't get afraid. I wrote it as urgent on that requisition book from R.M.Krishnaswamy - the cameraman. An urgent requisition from the cameraman department. Then people came for polishing and varnishing. He told me to bring the inch tape to measure. I didn't sit on that. Brought the inch tape to measure the stool. It was four and a half inches in height sixteen inches radius. Everything was ok and I told him to keep it behind the camera. Chintamani who became an astrologer later wrote to me a letter sometime back. They asked me to keep the camera at the back. He sat on that behind the camera. Then I did as he said and kept the camera at the back. Now he checked everything and sat. He measured the height and all I could see was the viewfinder at that time, very good. Then all these people from that moment they had soft respect for me. They thought that I was next to Sundaram. Though I never used to kick anybody, I never abused them, never commanded them anything. What I did was simply sat on that stool. Ready, ready. I was also a Chain-smoker. They would not allow smoking on the floor. I would go on the main gate door near the Veranda outside. I used to smoke outside. He used to ask, Is everything ready? I would say yes I am coming. Ok finish it off and come. Within these walls no smoking was allowed so I used smoke there. Unfortunately I happened to travel in a car with Sundaram. Sundaram, K.L.V Vasanth and I went to Kadallur.

04:43:37

ntai

Q: Was there some shooting?

A: 1000 Thalaivanga Apoorva Chinthamani's one scene was about to be shot there.

04:43:45

Q: Was K.L.V. Vasantha part of Apoorva Chintamani?

A: She came there to watch the shooting as a guest. They were sitting on the back seat. I was sitting on the front seat. I was also a bad smoker. How long could I control myself? I took one cigarette and smoked. He never spoke to me and I also didn't speak with him. That is what I say, that he was not an unreasonable old man. I have never found him unreasonable.

04:44:22

Q: Then what happened about this stool after that you sat there?

A: That's what it has now become a cameraman's stool. It has been designed to be named as cameraman stool. Cameraman stool came there. No tiffin would be provided on the set. These habits are still there. Tiffins are kept on the side. I used to call and ask him hey man what is in the tiffin. Bajji etc. I used to have my tiffin over there and he used to go out of the place. I went on like this I achieved so much there. They used to not provide water in outdoor locations through Modern Theatres. We didn't have any water as there were no production boys for 16 to 18 days outdoor shoot.

04:45:23

Q: Why what is the reason?

A: Nothing there was no production boys for all those days.

04:45:30

Q: Then how did the workers manage?

A: That's all nobody would ask.

04:45:33

Q: Then how did they work then? They provide tea to some artists like we do now.

A: That's what I am trying to tell you now that there was nothing of that facility. We went to Panamarathu Pathu where we used to get the first train. We went outdoors

after setting the camera the light went off completely. It was a very bad scenario. I sat on the folding stool and he was sitting on a chair. He lit his cigarette. One camera boy came there. I asked him that in Panamarathu Patti there must be nungu (Ice apple) over here? He said yes sir we will get it and I told him to bring some. He brought a basket full. How much did this cost? Rs2/- Sundaram was hiding. He did not pay the amount. Krishnaswamy, master came Kullampur and said master told to pay. He started eating and then everybody started eating. And he was saying if we go at any outdoor location pay him Rs 25. He started distributing biscuit packets and soda to staff during outdoor shoots. The point is people who have worked as assistants before me never had the guts to tell him what they needed. Even artists, senior artists, junior artists everybody had this impression was created on them that he would shout. When the car used to come there was absolute silence. Everybody in the set 14,15,16 and if we hear that he is coming... Sundaram is coming speed up the work.

04:48:48

Q: Was he a very talented technician as a director? He has made so many films.

A: No, he was not able to express what he wanted.

04:49:00

Q: Then how was he able to direct? Did he have any good assistants for direction?

A: There he had some assistants. But no one was good.

04:49:07

Q: Who was his assistant apart from Muktha Srinivasan I know.

A: Muktha Srinivasan was his assistant for a very short period only for Digambar Samiyar. Before that he had useless assistants who were kind of proofreaders.

04:49:19

Q: Who were his? Did he have any assistant as a film director?

A: There was an assistant. The first assistant was S. Notani. He used to go away with his wife previously. You do not know that? He is the one who took away his wife and that became a very big problem. She was an English honours and was an educated lady. She was looking at accounts and all that. You go with that woman and I go with this man what's wrong in that?

04:50:00

Q: So Notani was one of his assistants. He was a directorial assistant and who were the others?

A : Other people were all taken from here, One person Sundaresan - K R Sundaresan was there. He used to copy the Tamil dialogue. He never used to speak clearly. Based on the way he speaks I used to explain the Artist. No talented man was able to work with him because they were acquired. There were some assistants such as director H.L.M Simha - Kannada director who wrote Sansar Nauka. He was very strict and was Sundaram's assistant. One person called G V Narayanana was there. They all were educated people who knew what drama was and all that they could not last for very long. After that one person, Kabi Rayar stayed for a long time.

04:51:10

Q: What was Aditya Subbarao doing? He did some pictures for Modern Theatre.

A : The prolonged interview stretching for over 300 minutes with Mr R M Krishnaswamy comes to a point and sad and sudden end. Mr Krishnaswamy died suddenly on Sunday a couple of days ago at the Prakash studio in Kodambakkam, Madras. He had gone there to attend some urgent repairs. Some trees in the studio compound had fallen because of the recent cyclone that had hit Madras coast. Almost some week ago under which this part of the country is riling. And he went there to see what could be done so that the studio could be rendered fit for work to go on. R.M.K as he was familiarly known to all of us, his close friends and admirers and associates was involved in the running of the studio. The Prakash Studios was established by the well-known Telugu film director-producer and actor K.S. Prakash Rao. And over the course of years he had given it on lease to many people and the last few years Mr R.M. Krishnaswamy and an associate are partners of his, they were both involved. And while he was seated in his office room on Sunday morning, he felt slightly Giddy. And during the course of discussion with his assistants and other workers about what they should do to clear all the fallen trees and the debris that had collected around the compound he just put his head down the table and never lifted it again. Mr R.M. Krishnaswamy film director, producer, cameraman and Studio owner had briefed his last as he wished to while he was at work. He had not been doing well lately. He was a heart patient for quite a few years and also a diabetic. But when these interviews which have been recorded on tape for all time to come began at his residence some time ago. He was quite healthy and cheerful as articulate as the above was bubbling with his rare sense of humour. Mr Krishnaswamy was a very tough man, very disciplined, hardworking and he never suffered fools' clatter. He never allowed fools to get close to him for that matter. People who did not like to work were all lazy or were not so very disciplined were really scared of him. Even some of the senior artists used

to shudder when his name was whispered in their presence. Even a very senior superstar like Sivaji Ganesan used to be scared of him. That was his personality; he was a very bold dashing type of man who believed in calling a spade a spade and the nut a nut. His exterior was rough, there were quite a few who thought he was even on the root side but he was far from root. He was a very kind-hearted man and very generous with his advice and helped people younger than him and junior to him in this profession like myself. I was introduced to him in the late sixties if I recall the exact date if I could. That was sometime in September 66 when I was trying to make my way as a writer. I was then a struggling writer. I was practically unknown and I was introduced to him by another senior technician of South Indian cinema Mr A T Krishnaswamy who was a very close friend of mine. From the day we met at the residence of Mr A T Krishnaswamy who was then living in madras we hit it off very well and I never found that he was a difficult man to get on as some people in the industry had characterized him. He was far from it. I had the pleasure of working with him on a couple of screenplays and he taught me a lot about screenplay writing even though basically he was a cameraman essentially a lensman. He knew all the tricks of the trade, all that was necessary to be known for a filmmaker. He was a voracious reader; he had quite a few books on the movie industry on the various aspects of the business. Even in the seventies I once saw him reading a fairly lengthy book on the art of make-up "How plastic make-up could be used in Indian Cinema". He had lots of ideas and we used to meet very often and talk about movies, talk about film-making whether the film was art or was a craft or just an acquired skill. He had very clear and forthright views about whatever he wanted to say whatever he had in his mind. He was a very active technician almost in the last few years and he was intimately connected with the Cine Technicians Association of South India - A body of technicians known popularly as CTA of SI. He was also on the committee for some time later he was also associated as the secretary of the film director's council. He was very keen on bringing all the technicians together to pool their knowledge to share the knowledge, their experiences, and learn by their mistakes. He had all those ideals he was just not another cameraman. Mr Krishnaswamy will be remembered in the South Indian Film Industry for his most successful film Thhooku Thhooki which he did with Sivaji Ganesan. That picture was a success from the day of its first release from almost 30 years ago and even today it is running successfully to crowded houses in some parts of Tamil Nadu. As a matter of fact, he resold the rights in the film, the distribution rights in the film for a very handsome amount some few months back and he was very proud of it how that an old film made almost three decades ago by him was still doing so well. Almost too well when compared to the latest Tamil films that are being churned out week after week. He made films not only in Tamil like Thhokku Thhooki, Rajambal it was one of the very early crime thrillers in which R.S.Manohar the well known South Indian film actor and dramatist made his debut rather strangely as a hero later Manohar became a villain. And then he made films in Telugu also like Somwari

Mahatyam it was something of folklore. He gave a break to a struggling young man who came to Madras seeking fame and fortune called Shoban Babu. He played a very small role in one of his films and he always mentioned with a lot of humour that how he paid Shoban Babu 100 rupees or 150 rupees for his first film. Later on, Shoban Babu rose to become one of the superstars of Telugu Cinema which he still is happily. He also made films in Malayalam and one of the films I remember was the movie titled Dial 4422 again a crime thriller starring Prem Nazir. This was the movie in which I worked during the screenplay stage that was in the seventies. This movie did not do very well at the box office and he didn't attempt another film in that language later. Then he found that methods of movie-making or production techniques, methods of producing a film had changed from what he has seen or what he has experienced. The lack of discipline in film-making today or what is called a lot of fans or fancies of the artist which overtook the iron-hard discipline which should be there in any filmmaking. And he also found that things were not what they were used to be and he realized that a man of his temperament was not proper or it was not right to keep making films. He thought that he would not be able to have his way. His methods of filmmaking were very rigid, modelled on a Hollywood style that you should have a screenplay ready with all the shots, the shooting script itself, and then go to sets, rehearse the artists and so on which is something that is totally absent today especially in Tamil Cinema. And so he switched on to running the studios as an avocation and he took the well-known Newton Studios on a lease for some years he ran it as a studio which sadly is gone out of existence today. Then he went to Shymala Studios again in Kodambakkam which he ran for some time as a (inaudible) and I have done some of the recordings there in the studio and lately he was associated with another associate of his another partner of his in running the Prakash Studios again in Kodambakkam where he breathed his last. Mr R.M. Krishnaswamy was extremely kind to me at a time when I needed his kindness. He was very generous to me at a time when I needed his generosity. He was very helpful to me at a time when I needed his help. When I was struggling with an unknown entity of a writer in the world of creativity in Madras he gave me a lot of encouragement and said keep struggling and you will see the light at the end of the tunnel. The light always appears he used to say and I must say it did. Thanks to the advice and encouragement of good friends and good samaritans like R.M. Krishnaswamy. He had something more to say like some kind of general observations on the industry and some other personalities but unfortunately, death has deprived us all of all that wisdom and experience which he had carried to his untimely grave. He died exactly three days ago on Sunday and here we are on Tuesday paying the compliment for his work for his sincerity for his devotion to the chosen medium. R.M. Krishnaswamy will be remembered for his films Thhokku Thhoki, Rajambal and others. He will always be remembered with affection and gratitude by those who worked with him as me. And the film industry and the cinema world of South India will always remember him as one of the tough-talking technicians who

never brooked nonsense from any quarters. Thank you RMK wherever you are for all that you have done for us and the industry, the National Film Archive by whom you did spare your last hours on this planet will always feel extremely grateful and behold into you. Thank you.

That was the interview with R.M.Krishnaswamy, Cameraman, Film Director, Producer and Studio Owner. The interview was held at his residence over a period of days in Royapettah in Madras and it came to a sudden and sad end by his totally unexpected and shocking death on Sunday the 18th November 1984. May his soul Rest in Peace.



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