

மக்கள் மனதில் என்றும்

எம்.ஜி.ஆர்



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•எம்.ஜி.ஆர் நடித்த மொத்தப் படங்கள் 136. முதல் படம் சதிலீலாவதி(1936).கடைசிப் படம் மதுரையை மீட்ட சுந்தர பாண்டியன் (1977).

•பெரும்பாலும் (60 படங்கள்) தெலுங்குப் படங்களைத்தான் ரீ-மேக் செய்வார் எம்.ஜி.ஆர். அத்தனையும் என்.டி.ஆர். நடித்ததாகவே இருக்கும். 'உரிமைக்குரல்' மட்டும் விதிவிலக்கு. அது நாகேஸ்வர ராவ் நடித்த தெலுங்குப் படம் !

•எம்.ஜி.ஆரின் முதல் மனைவி தங்கமணி. இரண்டாவதாக சதானந்தவதியைத் திருமணம் செய்தார். அவரது மறைவுக்குப் பிறகு வி.என்.ஜானகி !

•எம்.ஜி.ஆர்.நடித்த 50 படங்களுக்குப் பாடல்கள் எழுதியவர் கண்ணதாசன். அவரின் 'அச்சம் என்பது மடமையடா... அஞ்சாமை திராவிட உடைமையடா' பாட்டு எம்.ஜி.ஆரின் காரில் எப்போதும் ஒலிக்கும் !

•விடுதலைப் புலிகளின் தலைவர் பிரபாகரனுக்கு 6 கோடியே 37 லட்சம் ரூபாய் பணம் கொடுத்து உதவியவர் எம்.ஜி.ஆர். அவருக்கு ஏ.கே.47 ரக துப்பாக்கியைப் பரிசாக அளித்தார் பிரபாகரன் !

•சிகரெட் பிடிப்பது மாதிரி நடிப்பதைத் தவிர்த்தார். 'நினைத்ததை முடிப்பவன்' படத்தில் சிகரெட்டை வாயில் வைப்பார். இழுக்க மாட்டார். மலைக்கள்ளனில் 'ஹீக்கா' பிடித்தது மாதிரி வருவார். இந்தக் காட்சியை வைப்பதா, வேண்டாமா என்ற குழப்பத்திலேயே படம் ரிலீஸ் ஆவதில் தாமதம் ஏற்பட்டதாம் !

•முதலமைச்சர் பதவியை ஏற்றுக்கொண்டால் ஷீட்டிங் போக முடியாது என்பதால், பதவியேற்பு விழாவையே 10 நாட்கள் தள்ளிப்போட்டு 'மதுரையை மீட்ட சுந்தரபாண்டியன்' படத்தை முடித்துக் கொடுத்தார் !

•'கர்ணன்' படத்தில் சிவாஜிக்கு முன்னதாக எம்.ஜி.ஆரைத்தான் கேட்டார்கள். 'புராணப் படம் பண்ண வேண்டாம்' என்று அண்ணா சொன்னதால் மறுத்துவிட்டார் எம்.ஜி.ஆர் !

•நம்பியாரும் அசோகனும் தான் எம்.ஜி.ஆருக்குப் பிடித்த வில்லன்கள். பி.எஸ்.வீரப்பாவும்,ஜஸ்டினும் இருந்தால் சண்டைக் காட்சிகளில் குவியாக நடிப்பார் !

•எம்.ஜி.ஆருடன் அதிக படங்களில் ஜோடியாக நடித்தவர் சரோஜா தேவி. அடுத்தது ஜெயலலிதா !

•எம்.ஜி.ஆர் – கருணாநிதி இணைந்து வெற்றி பெற்ற படம் 'மலைக்கள்ளன்'. ஜனாதிபதி விருது வாங்கிய முதல் தமிழ் சினிமா. இந்தியாவில் உள்ள பெரும்பாலான மொழிகளில் எடுக்கப்பட்ட படம் இது !

•காஞ்சித் தலைவனில் இருந்து தனது கட்டுமஸ்தான உடம்பைக் காண்பித்து நடிக்கத் தொடங்கினார்.எண்ணெய் தேய்த்துக் குளிக்கும் 'உரிமைக் குரல்' காட்சி பெண்களை அவர் பக்கம் ஈர்ப்பதில் பெரும் பங்கு வகித்தது !

•நாடோடி மன்னன், உலகம் சுற்றும் வாலிபன்,மதுரையை மீட்ட சுந்தரபாண்டியன் – முன்றும் எம்.ஜி.ஆர் டைரக்டர் செய்த படங்கள்.

•சினிமாவில் அதுவரை கட்சிக் கருத்துக்களைப் புகுத்துவார்கள்.ஆனால் எம்.ஜி.ஆர் காட்சிகளையே புகுத்தினார். தி.மு.க கொடி, உதயசூரியன் சின்னம், அண்ணா படம் இல்லாத படமே இல்லை என்ற அளவுக்கு வைத்தார் !

•எம்.ஜி.ஆர் எத்தனையோ குழந்தைகளுக்குப் பாதுகாவலராக இருந்து படிக்கவைத்தார். அதில் முக்கியமான இரண்டு பேர், அரசியலைக் கலக்கிய துரைமுருகன். சினிமாவில் வலம் வந்த கோவை சரளா !

•தமிழ் சினிமா ரசிகர்கள் பற்றி 1970 – ம் ஆண்டு எம்.ஜி.ஆர். அடித்த கமென்ட் இதுதான்....'அந்தக் காலத்து ரசிகர்கள் மாதிரி இப்ப உள்ளவங்க இல்லை. 10 நிமிஷங்களுக்கு ஒரு க்ளைமாக்ஸ் கேட்குறாங்க. அப்படி வெச்சாத்தான் படம் ஓடும் !'

•'பொன்னியின் செல்வன்' கதையைத் தமிழிலும் ஆங்கிலத்திலும் எடுக்க நினைத்தார் எம்.ஜி.ஆர். ஆங்கில வசனத்தை அண்ணாவை எழுதவும் கேட்டுக் கொண்டார். ஆனால், ஆசை நிறைவேறவில்லை !

•அறிமுகம் இல்லாதவராக இருந்தால், உடனே கை கொடுத்து 'நான் எம்.ஜி.ராமச்சந்திரன் – சினிமா நடிகர்' என்று அறிமுகம் செய்துகொள்வார்!

•ராமாவரம் தோட்டத்தில் ஆடு, மாடு, கோழி, நாயுடன் ஒரு கரடியும், சிங்கமும் வளர்த்தார் எம்.ஜி.ஆர். இவற்றைக் கவனிக்க தனி டாக்டர் வைத்திருந்தார் !

•ரொம்பவும் நெருக்கமானவர்களை 'ஆண்டவனே!' என்றுதான் அழைப்பார் !

•அடிமைப் பெண் பட ஷீட்டிங்குக்காக ஜெயப்பூர் போன எம்.ஜி.ஆர்.குளிசுக்காக வெள்ளைத் தொப்பி வைக்க ஆரம்பித்தார். பிடித்துப்போகவே அதைத் தொடர்ந்து பயன்படுத்த ஆரம்பித்தார் !

•எம்.ஜி.ஆர்.பகிரங்கமாகக் காலில் விழுந்து வணங்கிய பெருமை இரண்டு பேருக்கு உண்டு. ஒருவர், நடிகர் எம்.கே.ராதா. கத்திச் சண்டை, இரட்டை வேடங்களுக்கு இவர்தான் எம்.ஜி.ஆருக்கு இன்ஸ்பிரேஷன். இரண்டாமவர், ஹிந்தி டைரக்டர் சாந்தாராம். இவரது படங்களைத்தான் நிறையப் பின்பற்றினார் எம்.ஜி.ஆர் !

•முழுக்கை சில்க் சட்டை, லுங்கியுடன் தொப்பி, கண்ணாடி இல்லாமல் தன் காரை தானே டிரைவ் செய்து எப்போதாவது சென்னையை வலம் வருவது எம்.ஜி.ஆரின் வழக்கம். 'யாருக்கும் என்னைத் தெரியலை. தொப்பி, கண்ணாடி இருந்தாதான் கண்டு பிடிப்பாங்க போல' என்பாராம் !

•அன்னை சத்யாவை வணங்க ராமாவரம் தோட்டத்துக்குள்ளேயே கோயில் வைத்திருந்தார்.

•'நான் ஏன் பிறந்தேன்?' – ஆனந்த விகடனில் எம்.ஜி.ஆர் எழுதிய சுயசரிதைத் தொடர்.அதை அவர் முழுமையாக எழுதி முடிக்கவில்லை. அடுத்ததாகத் தொடங்கிய 'எனது வாழ்க்கை பாதையிலே' தொடரும் முற்றுப் பெறவில்லை. இன்றும் அவர் வாழ்ந்து கொண்டு இருப்பதாகவே நினைக்கும் ரசிகர்கள் இருக்கிறார்கள். முற்றும் பெறவில்லை அவர் பெருமைகள் !

வாழ்க்கைக் குறிப்பு,,,,,,

இராமச்சந்திரன் இலங்கையின் கண்டிக்கு அருகேயுள்ள நாவலப்பட்டியில் மருதூர் கோபாலமேன்னுக்கும் சத்தியபாமாவுக்கும் மகனாகப் பிறந்தார். அவருடை தந்தையின் மறைக்குப் பின்னர் தமிழ்நாட்டின் கும்பகோணத்தில் குடியேறினார். குடும்ப சூழ்நிலைகளின் காரணமாக படிப்பைத் தொடர முடியாததால் இவர்



நாடகங்களில் நடிக்கத் தொடங்கினார். நாடகத்துறையில் நன்கு அனுபவமான நிலைமையில் திரைப்படத்துறைக்குச் சென்றார். திரைப்படத்துறையில் தனது அயரா உழைப்புக் காரணமாக முன்னேறி நடிகரானார். இவரது நடிப்பு பெரும் எண்ணிக்கையாலான மக்களைக் கவர்ந்தது. எம்.ஜி.ஆர் திரைப்பட இயக்குனரும் தயாரிப்பாளருமாவார். இவர் தங்கமணியை மணந்தார். இவர் நோய்க்காரணமாக இறந்தார். அதன்பிறகு சதானந்தவதியை மணந்தார். இவரும் நோய்க்காரணமாக இறந்தார். பின்னர் இவர் வி.என் ஜானகியை மணந்து கொண்டார். இவருக்கு பிள்ளைகள் கிடையாது

திரைப்பட வாழ்க்கை,,

1936 ல் சதிலீலாவதி என்னும் திரைப்படத்தில் முதலில் நடித்திருந்தும், 1947 ல் அவர் நடித்த ராஜகுமாரி படம் வெளிவரும்வரை அதிகம் புகழ் கிடைக்கவில்லை. தொடர்ந்து வந்த அடுத்த 25 ஆண்டுகள், தமிழ் திரைப்பட உலகில் மிக முக்கியமானவர்களில் ஒருவராக விளங்கினார். இவருடைய சக நடிகர்களுள் ஒருவரான எம். ஆர். ராதாவினால் கூடப்பட்டுத் தெளிவாகப் பேசும் திறனை இழந்தபோதும் அவருடைய நட்சத்திர வலிமை குறையவேயில்லை. நல்ல குணங்கள் நிறைந்த கதா பாத்திரங்களையே தேர்வு செய்து நடித்தார்

எம்.ஜி.ஆர் என்ற மனிதர், நடிகராகி, புரட்சி நடிகராக, மக்கள் திலகமாக, நடிக மன்னராக, வசூல் சக்கரவர்த்தியாக, மூன்றெழுத்து மந்திரமாக, எங்க வீட்டுப் பிள்ளையாக, தாய்க்குலத்தின் தாரக மந்திரமாக, புவி போற்றிடும் புரட்சித் தலைவராகப் படிப்படியாகத் தனது புகழ் எனும் ஏணிப்படிகளில் ஏறி, தனது நிலைகளை மெல்ல மெல்ல உயர்த்தி, இன்றுவரை இந்தியத் துணைக்கண்டத்திலேயே எந்த நடிகராலும் பெற இயலாத மக்கள் செல்வாக்கைப்

பெற்று உயர்ந்தார். 1984ம் ஆண்டு அக்டோபர் 31ம் காலை 10:30 மணி வாக்கில் 12G பேருந்தில் பயணித்த போது,மயிலாப்பூர் லஸ் கார்னர் நிறுத்தத்தில் கடைகள் எல்லாம் அவசரமாக மூடும் காட்சி.பயணிகள் வியந்து பார்த்துக்

இத்தகைய உயர்வுகளைக் காண அவருக்கு உதவியன இரண்டே! ஒன்று, அவரது உயர்ந்த கருணை உள்ளம்! மற்றொன்று அவர் நடித்த திரைப்படங்கள்!

எம்.ஜி.ஆர். நடித்த திரைப்படங்களோ 135. இவற்றுள்ளும் அவர் கதாநாயகனாக நடித்த படங்களின் எண்ணிக்கை என்று பார்த்தாலோ 115 படங்கள்தான்



கொண்டிருந்த போது,சக பயணி "என்ன எம்.ஜி.யார். பூட்டாரா" என்று வியந்தார்.அடுத்த நொடி அந்த பயணியின் அருகில் அமர்திருந்தவர் அவர் கன்னத்தில் பளார் என்று ஒரு அறை வைத்தார்.அது எம்.ஜி.யார் உடல்நலக் குறைவால் ஆஸ்பத்திரியில் இருந்த நேரம்.இந்திரா காந்தி கொல்லப்பட்ட செய்தி பின்னர் தெரிந்தது.அதாவது எம்.ஜி.யார் இறப்பு என்பதைக் கூட கேட்க தயாராக இல்லாத அளவுக்கு அவர் மேல் அன்பு வைத்திருந்த மக்கள்.

இலங்கையில் பிறந்து கும்பகோணத்தை வந்தடைந்து,சினிமா உலகில் 1936ம் ஆண்டில் அடியெடுத்து வைத்தார்.ஆனால் 1947ம் ஆண்டில் "ராஜகுமாரி" படத்தின் மூலம் தான் பிரபலமடைந்தார். அதன் பிறகு முப்பது வருடத்திற்கு திரை உலகின் முடிசூட மன்னராக விளங்கினார்.இவருக்கு இசையில் மிகுந்த நாட்டம் இருந்தது.இவர் திரைப்படப் பாடல்கள் பலவற்றை இன்றும் கேட்டு மகிழ முடியும்.

தமிழக முதல்வராக இருந்த போது ஒரு முறை மதுரையில் எம்.எஸ்.சுப்புலக்ஷ்மி அவர்களின் இசை நிகழ்ச்சியை தொடங்கி வைக்க வந்தவர், மூன்று மணி நேரமும் அமர்ந்து ரசித்துக் கேட்டுச் சென்றதை உதாரணமாகக் கொள்ளலாம்.

மற்றவர்களுக்கு குறிப்பாக ஏழைகளுக்கு உதவும் குணம் இவரிடம்

இயற்கையாகவே இருந்தது.இயற்கை பேரழிவுகள் மற்றும் தனி மனித துன்பங்களுக்கு உதவுவது என்பதை பல முறைகள் செய்திருக்கிறார்.ராமதாசும் அவர் மகனும் இன்று ஒவ்வொரு நடிகராக சிகரட் மற்றும் குடிக்கும் காட்சிகளை படங்களில் இல்லாமல் பார்த்துக் கொள்ளுங்கள் என்று கெஞ்சிக் கொண்டிருக்கிறார்கள். ஆனால் இதை எம்.ஜி.யார் என்றோ கடை பிடித்தார் என்பதை நினைத்துப் பார்க்க ஆச்சிரியமாக இருக்கிறது.எம்.ஆர்.ராதாவால் கூடப் பட்ட போது அவருடைய போராடும் குணமும்,தன்னம்பிக்கையும் வெளிப் பட்டது.



ஏழைப் பங்காளனாக சினிமாவில் அவர் வளர்த்து வந்த உருவம் பிற்காலத்தில் அரசியலில் அவருக்கு பெரும் உதவியாக இருந்தது.அண்ணாதுரையும் எம்.ஜி.யாரை நன்றாக பயன்படுத்திக் கொண்டார்.1967ம் ஆண்டிலிருந்து 25 ஆண்டுகளுக்கு தமிழகத்தில் நடந்த எல்லா பொதுத் தேர்தல் முடிவுகளையும் தீர்மானிக்கும் சக்தியாகத் திகழ்ந்தார் எம்.ஜி.யார்.எம்.ஜி.யாரின் அரசியல் மற்றும் ஆட்சி பல விதமான விமர்சனத்திற்கு உள்ளானது. அவருடைய அரசியல் எந்த குறிப்பிட்ட கொள்கையோ,நீண்ட கால திட்டத்தை அடிப்படையாக கொண்டதாகவோ இருக்கவில்லை.



கருணாநிதியை எதிர்க்க வேண்டும் என்ற ஒரே குறிக்கோள் தான்.அதை இறுதி வரை அவரால் செய்ய முடிந்ததுதான் ஆச்சிரியம்.தி.மு.கவில் இருந்து வெளியேற்றிய உடன் கருணாநிதியைப் பற்றி கடுமையானப் பிரசாரத்தை மேற்கொண்டார்.1972ம் ஆண்டிலிருந்து 1977ம் ஆண்டு வரை இடை விடாமல் மக்களின் மத்தியில்,குறிப்பாக கிராம மக்களிடையே கருணாநிதி மேல் ஒரு தீராத வெறுப்பை ஏற்படுத்தினார்.அதனால் ஏழு ஆண்டு தண்டனை போதாதா,புறங்கையைத் தானே நக்கினோம் என்றெல்லாம் மன்றாடியும்

கருணாநிதியால் எம்.ஜி.யார் இருந்த வரை சட்டசபை தேர்தலில் வெற்றி பெற முடியாமல் போனது.



அண்ணாயிசம் என்ற சித்தாந்தத்தை கடைபிடிக்கப் போவதாக அறிவித்தார்.ஆனால் அதை சரியாக வரைமுறை செய்யவில்லை.

பல விளக்கங்களைக் கூறினார்.ஆனால் எதுவும் தெளிவாக இல்லை.உதாரணமாக ஏற்கனவே நாடோடி மன்னன் படத்தில் இதைப் பற்றி தான் கூறியதாகச் சொன்னார்.அண்ணாயிசம் என்பது பலராலும் கேலிக்குரிய பொருளானாலும்,அவருக்கு வாக்களித்த மக்களுக்கு அதைப் பற்றிய பெரிய கவலை இருந்ததாகத் தெரியவில்லை.பெரியாரின் முக்கியமான நாத்திகக் கொள்கையில் இவருக்கு பெரிய அளவு ஈடுபாடு இருந்ததாக தெரியவில்லை.தாய் மூகாம்பிகை கோவிலுக்கு சென்று வந்தது ஒரு சிறந்த எடுத்துக் காட்டு.ஆனால் பெரியாரின் தமிழ் எழுத்து சீர்திருத்தத்தை மிக சுலபமாக செயல் படுத்தினார். பிற்படுத்தப் பட்டவர்களுக்கு 69% இட ஒதுக்கீடு அமல் படுத்தியது இவர் ஆட்சியின் ஒரு பெரிய மைல் கல்லாகக் கருதப் படுகிறது.



அண்ணா பல்கலைக் கழகம் அமைத்து அதற்கு ஒரு தனி கவனத்தை பெற்றுக் கொடுத்தார்.இன்று அது மிகவும் புகழ் பெற்ற பல்கலைக் கழகமாக மாறி இருப்பது எம்.ஜி.யாருக்கு பெருமை சேர்க்கும் விஷயமாகும்.தமிழ் பல்கலைக் கழகமும், பெண்களுக்கான தனி பல்கலைக் கழகமும் அமைத்தது அவர் ஆட்சியின் நற்செயலாகக் கருதப் படுகிறது.காமராஜால் அறிமுகப் படுத்தப் பட்ட மதிய உணவு

திட்டத்தை விரிவாக்கியும், சீர்த்திருத்தியும் அமல் படுத்தியது பெரிய வரவேற்பை பெற்றது. அதை கருணாநிதி கூட ஆதரிக்கும் நிலை ஏற்பட்டது.



அவர் ஆட்சியின் மிகச் சிறப்பான பகுதியாக கருத வேண்டுமென்றால், பொது விநியோக முறையை நிர்வகித்த விதம் தான். ரேஷன் கடைகளில் அரிசி மற்றும் அத்தியாவசப் பொருட்கள் கிடைப்பதில் சிக்கல் இல்லாமல் இருந்தது. அதனால் கீழ் தட்டு மற்றும் நடுத்தர வர்க்கத்தினர் அன்றாட வாழ்கையை பிரச்சனை இல்லாமல் நடத்த முடிந்தது. இலங்கையில் உள்ள தமிழர்கள் இன்று கடுமையான துன்பத்திற்கு உள்ளாகும் நிலையில், எம்.ஜி.யார் அவர் ஆட்சி காலத்தில் இலங்கையில் தமிழர்களின் மீது நடந்த கூட்டுக் கொலையின் போது இலங்கை தமிழர்களுக்கு செய்த உதவியை நினைத்துப் பார்க்காமல் இருக்க முடியவில்லை.



புள்ளியியல் படி எம்.ஜி.யார் ஆட்சியில் அவருக்கு எப்போதும் ஆதரவளித்து வந்த கீழ் தர மக்கள் மிகுந்த நன்மை அடைந்ததாகக் கூற முடியாது. பெரிய தொலை நோக்குப் பார்வை இருந்ததாகக் கூற முடியாது. ஒரு வித உள்ளூணர்வின் அடிப்படையில் ஆட்சி செய்ததாகத் தெரிகிறது. முதல் 2 1/2 ஆண்டுகள் ஊழல் இல்லாத மது விலக்கை கடைபிடித்த ஆட்சி கொடுத்தாலும், 1980ம் ஆண்டு தேர்தலில் வெற்றி பெற்றவுடன், பெரிய அளவில் ஊழலும், மதுவிலக்கு நீக்கத்தால் மது தயாரித்து விற்ற நிறுவனங்களும், அதன் அதிபர்களும் அடைந்த லாபமும் பெருத்த ஏமாற்றம் தான். கருணாநிதியின் ஊழலை எதிர்த்து ஆரம்பித்த கட்சி, ஜெயலலிதாவின் வரலாறு காணாத ஊழலால் சரித்திரம் படைத்தது. இன்னும் இரட்டை இலை சின்னத்திற்கு இருக்கும் ஆதரவு இன்றும் எம்.ஜி.யாருக்கு மக்களிடையே இருக்கும் ஈர்ப்பு சக்தி தான் காரணம்.



" மூன்றெழுத்தில் என் முச்சிருக்கும்.... அது முடிஞ்ச பின்னாலும் என்
பேச்சிருக்கும்...."



MGR Remembered

Escapist? MGR protested. His films were certainly not escapist, he said. He recognized the link to Fairbanks. But 'Fairbanks, great as he was, is now forgotten'. An acting career, said MGR, must now have a political dimension, and he himself had found that in the Dravidian movement.

MGR Remembered on his 25th death Anniversary: Part 1 (Film Star)

As the first centenary of India's first feature-length movie [Dadasaheb G. Phalke's Raja Harischandra] falls in 2013, it is apt to remember M.G. Ramachandran (aka MGR, 1917-1987), a Tamil film star of repute who died on December 24, 1987. In this multi-part series, I present to readers details which are not known to many about this charismatic leader and benefactor, who lived amongst us.

One among the chosen 47 Actors

In 1996, "the definitive history of cinema worldwide", was published by the Oxford University Press, as 'The Oxford History of World Cinema'. This compendium of 824 pages was edited by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. It had a total of 80 contributors from many countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, UK, and USA), all of them movie scholars.

As representative examples of individuals who had contributed tremendously to the development of cinema, 134 were chosen for 'insets' (box stories). Among these, only three represented India's contribution to the film. These included, MGR, Ritwik Ghatak and Nargis. In his General Introduction to the tome, editor Nowell-Smith wrote the following:

“...The text of the book is interspersed with ‘insets’ devoted to individual film makers – actors, directors, producers and technicians – who have contributed in various ways to making the cinema what it has become.

The choice of individuals to feature has been inspired by a number of overlapping criteria. Some have been chosen because they are obviously important and well known, and no history of the cinema would be complete without some extended treatment of their careers. Examples in this category – taken more or less at random include D.W. Griffith, Ingmar Bergman, Marilyn Monroe and Alain Delon. But there are other people – the Indian ‘megastars’ Nargis or M.G. Ramachandran, for instance – who are less well known to western readers but whose careers have an equal claim to be featured in a history of world cinema...”

I present a scan of the ‘inset’ item presented in this reference work for MGR nearby. It was contributed by Asish Rajadhyaksha (born 1957), an Indian movie critic. I do not agree completely with the views presented in this ‘inset’ treatment, especially the penultimate sentence by Rajadhyaksha on MGR’s politics. (viz, “He remained a chief minister of Tamil Nadu until his death, winning three consecutive elections, despite a despotic, totalitarian and highly populist rule.”) This is an insult to the Tamil Nadu voters, who chose MGR as their chief minister consecutively for three times in general elections held in 1977, 1980 and 1984. This record has not been topped by any of MGR’s predecessors and successors (K. Kamaraj, C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalitha). One more comment. I was displeased by the selection of M.S.S. Pandian’s book ‘The Image Trap’ (1992, 166 pages), as the sole source on MGR. It was a dyspeptic, sloppy book, by an author who couldn’t analyze MGR’s career in films and politics, without bias. I’ll comment about the defects of this work in the future.

M.G. Ramachandran

(1917–1987)

Maradur Gopalamenon Ramachandran, known popularly as MGR, was one of the biggest movie stars in the Indian cinema, and a politician who after his death was deified with at least one temple in his native Madras. Born in Kandy, Sri Lanka, his family moved to Madras and apparently lived in poverty after his father's death. At the age of 6 he joined the Madurai Original Boys, a uniquely Tamilian popular costume theatre featuring children.

He made his screen debut in 1936 with *Sati Leelavati* (1936), a Tamil mythological, and worked for over a decade before he received his first lead role, in A. S. A. Sami's *Rajakumari* (1947). Ostensibly an Arabian Nights-type adventure movie in which a humble villager marries a princess, it allowed Ramachandran to exploit his fascination with Douglas Fairbanks's stunts. The success of this film coincided with events that were to influence his entire career. In 1949 the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a political party in defence of the Dravidians (or the indigenous peoples of south India), was formed by the playwright and script-writer C. N. Annadurai on an anti-north, anti-Brahmin, and atheist platform. It concentrated its propaganda on a series of commercial film hits.

Ramachandran, who had already established his credentials in the stunt sequences of *Rajakumari* wearing a black shirt, the uniform of the Dravida Kazhagam, became a star of the Tamil cinema with the major DMK film *Manthiri Kumari* (1950). Written by future Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, the film adapted an eighth-century Tamil text into an adventure saga in which the good prince defeats the evil son of a corrupt priest. Its success led on to a series of further adventure movies, including an *Alibaba and the Forty Thieves* (1956), before his next big DMK movies *Madurai Veeran* (1956) and *Nadodi Mannan* (1958) made him the icon of the DMK, and its biggest crowd-puller. These films were quasi-historicals about 'ancient times'. *Madurai Veeran* is a popular Tamil Nadu village deity and the subject of numerous ballads and plays; the film was set in the sixteenth century, where the infant prince Veeran, abandoned in the forest, is protected by an elephant and a snake, and raised by a cobbler. He falls in love with a princess who is also the king's (his real father's) mistress. He is sentenced to death and killed, just before the king realizes that Veeran is his son. Veeran, his wife, and his lover all ascend to heaven, thus allowing the star to be a tragic lover, a prince, and a god all at once.

Manthiri Kumari and *Madurai Veeran* both continued a DMK-inspired revisionist rewriting of Tamil history, and a political appropriation of icons of the agrarian lower castes. *Nadodi Mannan*, Ramachandran's directorial



Among the 134 individuals who received such recognition, only 47 were

actors (both sexes included). Among the remaining 87, directors (70) constituted the majority. The rest (17) included 7 producers, 3 cameramen, 3 set designers, 1 sound specialist, 1 documentary producer, 1 film distributor and 1 movie industry lawyer. This selection was primarily based on those who were not living when the book appeared. As such, 97 among the 134 selections for 'inset' treatment had died by 1996. This criterion of selection is to be commended in that, the direct or indirect influence exerted by the nominee may not sway the selection jury for this sort of compendium. That MGR's influence to Indian film industry received such a ranking in an international reference work, within 10 years of his death deserves notice.

For information, I provide the names of 47 actors who achieved this recognition (according to their chronological year of birth) and their countries. Note that USA is represented by Hollywood.

William S.Hart (1865-1946) – Hollywood

Louis Feuillade (1873-1925) – France

Tom Mix (1880-1940) – Hollywood

Asta Nilsen (1881-1972) – Germany

Max Linder (1882-1925) – France

Lon Chaney (1883-1930) – Hollywood

Douglas Fairbanks (1883-1939) – Hollywood

Maurice Chevalier (1888-1972) – France/Hollywood

Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) – Hollywood

Ivan Mosjoukine (1889-1939) – Russia

début, differed from this pattern, being a directly political adventure fantasy addressing a wholly fictional past. He played a double role, which he was to do many times subsequently; the good king who is replaced with a look-alike commoner by the corrupt high priest. The priest was a barely disguised reference to the ruling Congress Party, and colour sequences in the otherwise black and white film showed the red and black DMK flag being hoisted as well as shots of the rising sun, the party's symbol. The 100th day of its commercial run became an occasion for a massive DMK political rally, in which Ramachandran sat on a chariot drawn by four horses.

Through the 1960s, Ramachandran consolidated his political and cultural position with films that became increasingly realistic, while maintaining his invincible screen persona. A series of screen references underscored his credentials as a representative of the poor. In *Thozhilali* (1964) he plays a manual labourer who educates himself, and leads an uprising against a tyrannical employer whom he eventually reforms. He played a peasant, a boatman, a quarry worker, and a shoeblack, and, in P. Neelakantan's *Mattukkara Velan* (1969), a cowherd who helps to solve a murder case that has baffled a lawyer. Later, even more effectively, he plays a rickshaw-puller (*Rickshawkaran*, 1971).

He was briefly a member of the State Legislative Assembly in 1967, the year the DMK came to power in Tamil Nadu. That year, when fellow actor M. R. Radha shot at and injured him, affecting his speech, he achieved virtually demi-god status as numerous fans immolated themselves in order to propitiate the gods and hasten his recovery. Within three years he fell out with the party leaders, and used the DMK film style to critique the party itself in an extraordinary fantasy, *Nam Naadu* (1969), where the nationalist hero masquerades as a smuggler in order to record on film the confessions of the real villains of society, a doctor, a builder, and a merchant. He set up a rival party, the Anna-DMK, eventually leading it to power in 1977. He remained the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu until his death, winning three consecutive elections, despite a despotic, totalitarian, and highly populist rule. The power base of his party was the All-World MGR Fans' Association which continues to have 10,000 branches across the state.

ASHISH RAJADHYAKSHA

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

Sati Leelavati (1936); Rajakumari (1947); Velaikkari (1949); Nallathambi (1949); Manthiri Kumari (1950); Alibaba and the Forty Thieves (1956); Madurai Veeran (1956); Nadodi Mannan (1958); Thozhilali (1964); Mattukkara Velan (1969); Nam Naadu (1969); Rickshawkaran (1971)

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Opposite: Enga Veetu Pillai (1965)

France

Lilian Gish (1893-1993) – Hollywood

Mary Pickford (1893-1979) – Hollywood

Conrad Veidt (1893-1943) – Germany/ Hollywood

Bustor Keaton (1895-1966) – Hollywood

Rudolph Valentino (1895-1926) – Hollywood

Gracie Fields (1898-1979) – Britain

Dorothy Gish (1898-1968) – Hollywood

Paul Robeson (1898-1977) – Hollywood

Toto (1898-1967) – Italy

Fred Astaire (1899-1987) – Hollywood

Marlene Dietrich (1901-1992) – Hollywood

Max Ophuls (1902-1957) – Germany

Jean Gabin (1904-1976) – France

Greta Garbo (1905-1990) – Hollywood

Barbara Stanwyck (1907-1990) – Hollywood

John Wayne (1907-1979) – Hollywood

Bette Davis (1908-1989) – Hollywood

Jacques Tati (1908-1982) – France

Burt Lancaster (1913-1994) – Hollywood

M.G.Ramachandran (1917-1987) – India

Shirley (Yoshiko) Yamaguchi (1920 –) – Japan

Judy Garland (1922-1969) – Hollywood

Marlon Brando (1924-) – Hollywood

Ingrid Bergman (1925-1982) – Hollywood

Youssef Chahine (1926 –) – Egypt

Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) – Hollywood

Sidney Poitier (1927 –) – Hollywood

Nargis (1929-1981) – India

Clint Eastwood (1930 –) – Hollywood

Brigitte Bardot (1934 –) – France

Alain Delon (1935 –) – France

Jack Nicholson (1937 –) – Hollywood

Arnold Schwarzenegger (1947 –) – Hollywood

Gerard Depardieu (1948 –) – France

Chantal Akerman (1950 –) – Belgium-France

Jodie Foster (1962 –) – Hollywood

As is typical to film stars and scientists, the countries in which many were born are different from the country they are identified for their professional success. Apart from MGR, even Chaplin, Ingrid Bergman, Asta Nilsen, Greta Garbo, and Schwarzenegger belong to this unusual category.

Of course, many movie fans would claim that this list of actors have either many serious omissions or irrelevant additions. Great names such as Laurence Olivier, Toshiro Mifune and Sivaji (V.C.) Ganesan had

been omitted. One reason could be that, Toshiro Mifune and Sivaji Ganesan were living when the final cut for selection was made, and the selection was strongly biased towards those who had died by 1995. In my view, omission of Laurence Olivier was regrettable, as he had died in 1989. Personally, I also feel that among women Hollywood stars, either Katherine Hepburn or Meryl Streep should have been included in the choice for 'insets', in preference to Jodie Foster. As all three were living when the book appeared, the selection was biased towards Jodie Foster, who represents a minority group of sexual orientation.

Erik Barnow's Thoughts on MGR

Erik Barnow (1908-2001), a professor emeritus of Dramatic Arts, at Columbia University, in his memoir [Media Marathon: a twentieth century memoir, 1996] had included his interactions with MGR as one chapter. In fact, he co-authored a classic book Indian Film (1963), with his student S. Krishnaswamy (who was a son of Tamil movie pioneer/director K.Subrahmanyam, and a sibling of Padma Subrahmanyam – the famed Bharatha Natyam dancer). Some materials that Barnow included in his memoir were transferred from the text of Indian Film.

I provide below some excerpts (only five paragraphs) on what Barnow describes about his meeting with MGR in 1961-62, and events that followed in 1967 and thereafter.

“His father had been principal of a school in Sri Lanka – at the time, Ceylon – where MGR was born. But his father died when MGR was three, causing the family to move to Madras (sic), where he said they lived in poverty. Two sisters and a brother died. At six MGR joined a dramatic troupe, the Madurai Original Boys Company, who trained him in dancing and swordplay. His film career began when he was in his teens. He became a star in his twenties. Since then he had played some hundred hero roles. There were theaters that had, for several years, played only MGR films.

We asked about his interest in politics. How committed was he to a political career? We pointed out that his films were often compared to those of Douglas Fairbanks. Because they seemed escapist to most people, we had not suspected him of political interest.

Escapist? MGR protested. His films were certainly not escapist, he said. He recognized the link to Fairbanks. But 'Fairbanks, great as he was, is now forgotten'. An acting career, said MGR, must now have a political dimension, and he himself had found that in the Dravidian movement. The roles he played, like the folk hero in Nadodi Mannan, battling a royal usurper, meant something. To his followers it represented their own struggle against the north, controlled by Hindi-speaking bureaucrats. Already in New Delhi, government positions went mainly to those who spoke Hindi. Their policies favored the north. Under the Congress Party the south was becoming a sort of colony. The establishment in New Delhi, led by old Brahmins, had turned into a kind of royalty. They were the usurpers who must be overthrown. MGR's followers understood all that. In Nadodi Mannan, the opening song made it clear: 'Oh divine Tamil...who reflect the glories of ancient Dravidians!'

We were surprised by these words. Such ideas did not find expression in film journals. We had not anticipated a rationale of this sort from the 'idol of the masses'. Yet the fact was that the DMK – that fan club in politics, that absurdity, that band of koothadi – was transforming Indian politics. It had already taken control of the Madras city government and put scores of film people into state legislatures. Soon afterwards it sent the party founder, screenwriter Annadurai, brother of the lowly, to the parliament in New Delhi, to breathe defiance in the stronghold of the enemy. An astounding political turn appeared in the making."

Few comments are in order. In the first paragraph quoted above, Barnow had stated that MGR's father (Gopala Menon) was a principal of a school. To the best of my knowledge, records on which school he served as the principal in the 1910s is lost to history now. In all probabilities, it could have been a small 'primary level estate school'

educating the children of indentured Indian laborers. That MGR's family moved to Madras is in error. MGR's mother Sathyabama took his two surviving sons to Kumbakonam city, where one of her kins was residing. At the time, when Barnow interviewed MGR during 1961-62, MGR was in the DMK party, led by C.N. Annadurai. He did complete his 100th film (OLi Vizhakku) only in 1968, four years behind that of his junior contemporary Sivaji Ganesan. Whereas Sivaji Ganesan's debut movie was released in 1952, MGR had his movie debut in 1936. It took more than a decade for MGR to raise his status to the hero rank. In the 1930s and 1940s, actors who could sing received the top billing and MGR (not trained as a classy singer!) had to wait for his opportunity.

In the early movies MGR acted as a hero, he was billed as M.G. Ramchandrar. There has been some doubts (queries) relating to why MGR adopted this variant stage name. The simple answer was that, Ramachandran being a common male name among Tamils, there were too many 'Ramachandran' actors competing for spots in 1940s; T.R. Ramachandran (TRR), and T.K. Ramachandran (TKR) comes to my mind. Especially, TRR was a potential rival. When I studied the Tamil movies released between 1944 and 1947, I noted this rivalry. The Tamil movies released during the 'lean' years of Second World War period and post-war era were: 10 in 1944, 10 in 1945, 12 in 1946 and 29 in 1947. The number of completed movies acted by TRR and MGR in these years were in 1944 (TRR 1, MGR nil), 1945 (TRR 2, MGR 2), 1946 (TRR 6, MGR 1) and 1947 (TRR 5, MGR 2). Only when the number of movies produced doubled to that of previous year in 1947, MGR received his first hero role. Later, both T.R. and T.K. Ramachandrars acted in support roles in a few MGR's movies.

In a subsequent paragraph, Barnow had rounded up MGR's life as follows:

"In many Ramachandran films the villain had been played by the actor M.R.Radha. Between the villain-actor and the hero-actor some animosity developed. On a day in 1967 Radha paid Ramachandran a visit. Two shots were fired. Both were found wounded. Each said the

other had fired first; no one believed the villain. He was indicted, convicted, and jailed. MGR languished in a hospital. He was at the time a candidate for the state legislature, and the campaign went on. Campaign posters showed MGR with his head swathed in bandages. Huge crowds kept vigil. His survival seemed to confirm his more-than-human status. He was elected in an unprecedented landslide. In 1977 he became chief minister of the state of Madras – which had meanwhile been renamed Tamilnadu. He was to remain its chief minister for more than a decade, a power in national politics. When he died in 1988(sic), at least ten followers were said to have committed suicide.”

MGR died in December 1987, and not in 1988. On MGR’s political views, Barnow had noted the following:

“Asked about his [MGR, that is] political views, he said he believed in ‘the best of capitalism combined with the best of communism’. He seldom went beyond this, and wasn’t asked to. His campaign appearances were more like movie premieres than political rallies. They were variety shows with guest stars: movie singers, dancers, and comedians. Film song rang through the air.”

One should not forget that Barnow talked to MGR in 1961 when the latter was 44. Like anyone, MGR’s political views matured with time, in the next 16 years.

A word on MGR’s associates and ‘regulars’ in films

There have been accusations that MGR (in his prime) demolished the careers of some of his fellow artistes in the Tamil movie world. Comedians J.P. Chandrababu, Kuladeivam Rajagopal and even poet Kannadasan have been included in this list. One should note, MGR did offer opportunities for these artistes in quite a number of his movies. Even if the accusation may be true to some extent, the contrary is also true. MGR indeed helped many artistes (heroines, villains, comedians, lyricists, directors, and playback singers) to elevate their careers and earning capacities. There were many who thrived on MGR’s

munificence. Those who gained MGR's trust were never left behind. This was because, MGR knew the reality that film making is a joint, collaborative effort. He alone (however powerful and attractive to his audience) couldn't make a success out of any single movie. It should also be remembered that in the past 25 years, many whose careers benefited from their association with MGR, have also died. These include V.N. Janaki, P. Bhanumathi and Padmini (among heroines); K.A.Thangavelu, V.K. Ramasamy, and Nagesh (among comedians and character actors); P.S.Veerappa, M.N. Nambiar, and R.S. Manohar (among villains); Tiruchi Loganathan, A.M.Raja, C.S.Jayaraman and Sirkali Govindarajan (among playback singers who offered their voice to MGR for song sequences).

I got the inspiration to write MGR's biography three years after his death in 1987. A book review by Sunil K. Pandya of India's leading nephrologist M.K.Mani's autobiography, which appeared in the British Medical Journal of March 24, 1990, carried a two sentence quip as follows:

“Those seeking a similar account on the late chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M.G.Ramachandran, will be disappointed. Neither he nor his heirs have authorized Dr Mani to narrate that tale, marred as it is by several sordid aspects over which Dr Mani had no control.”

திருமணமாகிய ஒரு பெண்ணை, நான் அபகரித்து எனது பாதுகாப்பில் வைத்திருப்பதாகப் போலீஸில் புகார் கொடுக்கப்பட்டு, என்னைக் கைது செய்து வழக்குப் போடச் செய்யவும், 'மருதநாட்டு இளவரசி' படப் பிடிப்பை நிறுத்திவிடவும் முயலுவதாக அறிந்தேன். பணத்தின் பலமோ, பெரிய அ அதிகாரிகளின் சிபாரிசோ, புகழின் பாதுகாப்போ எதுவும் அற்ற ஒருவனாகிய நான் எந்த வலுவில் என் மீது ஏற்றப்படும் கமையைத் தாங்கிக் கொள்ளுவது?

வசதி மிக்க நண்பர்களாவது எனக்கு இருக்கின்றார்களா என்றால், இன்று எப்படியோ, அன்றும் இப்படியேதான்.

எந்த வசதி படைத்தவர்களும் எனது நெருங்கிய நண்பர்களாக எனக்கில்லை. உழைப்பிலும் அறிவிலும் நம்பிக்கை வைத்துப் பணம் வரினும் அதைச் சேர்த்து வைத்துக் கொள்ளாது, மேலும் மேலும் பலதொழில் களை அந்தப் பணத்தை மூலதனமாக

வைத்து ஆரம்பிக்கும் 'தொழில் அக்கறை'யும், பலருக்குத் தொழில் வாய்ப்புக் கொடுக்க வேண்டும் என்ற ஆர்வமும் கொண்ட ஒரு சிலர்தான் எனது நண்பர்கள். அதுகூட மிகச் சமீப காலமாகத்தான்.

எனவே, அன்று 'எனக்கு நானே! நானே எனக்கு!' என்ற தனி மரமாகத் தான் நெருக்கடியைச் சந்திக்க வேண்டியவனாக இருந்தேன்.

நான் மிகச் சொற்ப ஊதியமே பெற்று வேலை செய்து கொண்டிருந்தவன். அடுத்து எனக்கு, எப்போது புதிய படத்தில் ஒப்பந்தம் ஆகும் என்று கூற இயலாத நிலையிலிருந்தேன். நானே சென்று வேலை கேட்டால் மரியாதை இருக்காது; மதிப்பும் இருக்காது. சம்பளமும் குறைத்துச் சொல்வார்கள். 'சதாநாயகன்

உண்மைக்கும் உணர்வுக்கும் பிரதிநிதிகள்



I wrote to the reviewer soliciting information about where I could purchase a copy of this Dr. Mani's autobiography. He did reply and I could purchase a copy only in 2007, via an internet book vendor. When I scanned the 278 pages of this autobiography, I realized that the reviewer for the British Medical Journal had 'embellished' bits and pieces (such as "several sordid aspects over which Dr Mani had no control") that were not in the book itself. Dr. Mani (the chief nephrologist at the Apollo Hospital, Madras, when MGR was admitted in October 1984) had only stated the following: "The reader expecting the story of the VIP patients I treated at Apollo will be disappointed. I have not been authorized to speak about them." (p.266) Dr Mani had not included one or many of the 'sordid aspects' (which the reviewer had implied) relating to MGR's kidney troubles in his book. Few pages earlier, Dr. Mani had presented a positive example for MGR's philanthropic instinct, as follows: "When the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu had a renal transplant, azathioprine, an expensive drug needed to prevent rejection of the kidney, was made available free at Government Hospitals. Thus does the common man benefit from the misfortunes of the great." (p. 252)

Dr. Mani's snobbish view on MGR's films

Dr. Mani, belonging to the elite and educated class among the Tamil Nadu residents, did in fact wrote his snobbish view on MGR's films in his autobiography. To quote,

"I had never seen an MGR movie before, and I was astounded at the audience reaction. There was a burst of applause when his name appeared in the titles, and then, whenever he appeared on the screen, applause, whistles, cheers, brought the house down. He always appeared in the nick of time to save the damsel in distress, he never hesitated to sacrifice his all for the poor. I wonder whether he had his eye on a future in politics even then, for he never accepted the often more challenging role of a bad or weak person. Our simple audience felt he was not acting, but was living a part of his real life, on the screen, and what he displayed was his own true character." (p.113)

வேடம்' ஏற்று ஒரு படத்தில் நடித்திருந்தேனே தவிர, படத் தயாரிப்பாளர்கள் என்னையே ஒப்பந்தம் செய்ய வேண்டும் என்ற எண்ணத்தை உருவாக்கும் வலிவை எனது புகழ்பெறவில்லை; நானாகக் கேட்கவும் முடியாது; அவர்களாக அழைக்கும் நிலைக்கு நான் உயர்த்தப் படவும் இல்லை...ஆமாம், உயர்த்தப் படவில்லை.

நடிகர்கள், பாடல்கள் முதலிய கலைஞர்கள் உண்மையிலேயே எத்தகைய உயர்ந்த கலை அறிவு படைத்திருப்பினும் மக்கள் அவர்தம் கலைத்திறனை ஏற்றுக் கொண்டால்தானே, போற்றப்படுகின்றனர்... புகழப்படுகின்றனர். அதன் பிறகு அந்தக் கலைஞர்கள் சொல்லும் கலைக் கருத்துக்களே சில வேளைகளில் இலக்கணமாகவும் ஆகிவிடுகின்றனவே! இதற்கெல்லாம் அடிப்படையாக, மக்கள் ஏற்றுக் கொள்ள வேண்டும் முதலில். ஆகவே எந்தக் கலை உலகத்தொழிலாளர்களும் மக்களால் உயர்த்தப்பட வேண்டும்.

கடவுள்தான் இந்த உலகத்தை, உயிரினத்தைப் படைத்தான் என்ற நம்பிக்கையின் அடிப்படையில் ஒரு சில கேள்விகளை எனக்கு நானே கேட்டுக்கொள்ள விரும்புகிறேன்.

உலகத்திற்கே ஒரே ஒரு கடவுள்தான் இருக்க முடியும்! இதில் யாருக்கும் கருத்து வேறுபாடிருக்காது.

அந்தந்த மக்களின் அறிவாற்றலுக்கேற்றற்போல் கடவுளின் பெயர்கள், வணங்கும் முறைகள் இவற்றில் வேறுபாடுகள் இருக்கத்தான் செய்கின்றன.

அவற்றில் சில வழிமுறைகள் மதத்தின் பெயராலும் அமைந்து விட்டிருக்கின்றன.

இத்தகைய மத நம்பிக்கை கொண்டவர்கட்கிடையில் சிறு சிறு சச்சரவுகளிலிருந்து மிகப் பெரிய போர்களும் நடைபெற்றிருக்கின்றன. இவை அனைத்தும் கடவுள் நம்பிக்கை என்ற அடிப்படையில்

உருவாக்கப்பட்டவைகள்தாம். எந்த ஒரு கடவுளால் இந்த உலகம் படைக்கப்பட்டதோ, எந்த உயிரினங்கள் அந்தக் கடவுள் என்னும் மாபெரும் சக்தியால் படைக்கப்பட்டனவோ அந்தச் சக்தியைக் காப்பாற்ற, கடவுளைக் காப்பாற்ற அதே மனித அங்கத்தினர் பிரிந்து, ஒருவரை யொருவர் அழித்துக் கொண்டார்கள் என்று வரலாறு கூறுகிறது. இன்றும் அழித்துக் கொள்ளுவதாகச் சேதி நமக்குத் தரப்படுகிறது.

கோடம்பாக்கத்திலுள்ள பெரிய மேம்பாலம் கட்டப்படாத அந்தக் காலத்தில் சாலையின் நடுவிலிருந்த ரயில் கதவை அடிக்கடி ரயில் போக்கு வரத்துக்காகச் சாத்தி விடுவார்கள். மறுபக்கம் போக முடியாமல் வண்டியிலே செல்பவர்கள் சில நேரங்களில் மணிக்கணக்காகக் கூடக் காத்திருக்க வேண்டி வரும். இந்தத் தாமதத்திலிருந்து தப்புவதற்கு எங்களைப் போன்றவர்களுக்கு வேறு வழி கிடைத்தது. அந்த இடத்திற்கு இரண்டு மூன்று பர்லாங் தூரத்தில் இன்னொரு (கேட்) கதவு இருந்தது. ரயில் போனவுடன் அந்தக் கதவுகளைத் திறந்து விடுவார்கள். அதிக நேரம் காத்திருக்க வேண்டியிராது. அந்த வழிக்கு நாங்கள் 'சின்ன கேட்' என்று பெயர் வைத்திருந்தோம்.

அந்த வழியாகப் போகத் தியாக ராயநகர் பனகல் பார்க்கிற்கு அடுத்ததுள்ள ராமகிருஷ்ண பள்ளிக்கு அடுத்ததுள்ள ஒரு சந்தின் வழியாகத்தான் போவோம்.

அந்தத் தெருவில் கடவுள் சிலை இருந்தது. மண்டபமோ வேறு எந்தக் கட்டடங்களோ இல்லை.

எப்போதாவது மாலை நேரங்களில் வழக்கமாக வரும் ஓரிருவர் கூட இருக்க மாட்டார்கள். அதைப் பார்த்து நாங்கள் ஒருவருக்கொருவர் பேசிக் கொள்ளும்போது கேலியாக, "அய்யோ, பாவம்! ஏழை சாமி போல இருக்கு...யாருமே சுவனிக்க மாட்டேங்கறாங்க" என்போம்.

எம். ஜி. ஆர்.

ஆண்டி விகடன் 1972 (post-June period)

MGR autobiography segment 120 p2

About his snobbish pedigree, Dr. Mani did write in the early pages of his autobiography, as follows: “My unexpected ally was the one administrator in the family, my father, T.M.S. Mani. He had a brilliant academic career, collecting prizes and medals all the way, and his father determined to see him in the I.C.S. Admittedly, the I.C.S. in the late 1920s and early 1930s was a ruling elite. The power wielded by a Collector or a Secretary was almost that of a king, the salary seemed excellent in those days of no inflation and low taxes, and entry was so difficult that only the brightest would think of it...” (p.3)

Why I provide these details is that, Dr. Mani was not an exception among literate Tamils, either in Tamil Nadu or in Eelam, to look down on the mentality of illiterate day laborers and cart pushers who viewed MGR as their idol and god. For the educated snobs, MGR craze exhibited by the Tamil illiterates was childish and silly.

MGR’s Life Phases and his Autobiography

MGR’s life can be conveniently separated into four phases. These are as follows: (1) Poverty-tinged Pre-Hero Years (1917-1947), (2) Film Hero Years (1947-1967), (3) Double-Role Years (Film Hero and Politician Apprentice, 1967-1977), (4) Political Hero Years (1977-1987). In his 70 year life span, he spent 30, 20, 10 and 10 years in each of these four phases.

Most of the published writings by his friends, friends turned rivals, close acquaintances, journalists, few academic critics and fans focus only the last 40 years of MGR’s activities. Not much is known or written about his first 30 years. One of the reliable works in this respect was the four volume autobiography of M.Karunanidhi (MGR’s friend-turned-political rival), who was a predecessor and successor to MGR in the chief minister stakes in Tamil Nadu. MGR makes his entrance in Karunanidhi’s autobiography only around 1946 (chapter 19 of volume 1, 1975), when Karunanidhi assisted in script writing for Rajakumari (Princess), MGR’s first movie as a hero. How, Karunanidhi had described his early acquaintance with MGR:

“As there was no hindrance for my party work, I accepted script writing for the Rajakumari movie and with the permission of Mr. A.S. A. Samy, I began writing the script. That was the movie, Puratchi Nadigar [Revolutionary Actor] MGR played the hero role for the first time. Our acquaintance began around that time. He wore kadhi dress with athulasi bead necklace and was a fan of Gandhi. I used to give the books authored by Anna. He used to give me books by Gandhi. We used to have debates occasionally. The result was that, he later joined the Kazhagam (party) clique.”

Thus, for the poverty-tinged pre-hero period of MGR’s life, one has to rely strongly on MGR’s reminiscences and interviews. Fortunately, MGR did contribute an autobiography series entitled, ‘Naan Yen Piranthaen’ [Why I was Born?] to the popular Ananda Vikatan weekly between 1970 and 1972. As per this writing, some questions arise. Was it ghost-written? Or was it dictated into a tape, and transcribed by one of his trusted writers? Considering the fact that he was a busy film star, it is a no brainer that he would have taken the trouble to write this series for two years on a weekly basis.

Controversy on the Copyright ownership of MGR’s Autobiography

A compilation of this MGR autobiography into two parts which was published in 2003 had created problems and law suits between MGR’s family members of the next generation. The prime issue was who holds the copyright for MGR’s autobiography after his death. I provide a recap of this nasty fight, as it played out in Chennai courts.

P.C.Vinoj Kumar, contributing a review of the case in Feb.1, 2004, to www.mid-day.com/ wrote as follows:

“A dispute over the exclusive ownership of the copyright of former Chief Minister late M.G. Ramachandran’s autobiography Naan Yen Piranthaen (Why I was Born?) resulted in the seizure of 92 copies of the book last week. An advocate commissioner seized the books following an order passed by the Madras High Court. The Madras High Court also

restrained Sudha Vijayakumar, a close relative of MGR's wife V.N. Janaki, and the publishers, from printing, publishing or selling copies of the book, until further orders. The advocate commissioner P.Nallathai informed the Court that out of the 1,000 books printed, 50 copies were sold to the public, 18 copies given to the media, and 17 copies were sold at the book fair at Salem. Another hundred books were given to Sudha Vijayakumar as royalty and the balance of 723 copies was in the process of binding.

Claiming exclusive ownership of the copyright of MGR's autobiography is V.N. Janaki's son J. Surendran, born to her through her first husband..."

Vinoj Kumar did interview J. Surendran. The answers offered by Surendran had factual errors relating to dates. I correct them, in this reproduction, noting the corrections at appropriate locations. According to Surendran,

"MGR's autobiography was published as a series of articles in the famous Tamil weekly magazine Anandha Vikaran in 1970-71 [sic, 1970-72]. MGR retained the exclusive copyright of the articles. He has not given it to anyone. He left behind a registered will dated January 18, 1987. The will did not cover the copyright. Hence, the copyright was vested in his wife Janaki, who was his sole legal heir. Janaki died in 1995 [sic, 1996] and she left behind a will. Her will too did not cover the copyright. The copyright belongs to me because I am her sole legal heir. I am the one and only son of Janaki. Nobody can publish MGR's autobiography without my permission. Sudha Vijayakumar (Janaki's niece) has published the book without getting my permission. When I learned that they were planning to publish the book, I tried to dissuade them. But they did not listen to me. That's why I approached the court."

This Surendran was 65 then. Now, he should be around 73! On July 4, 2012, the Hindu newspaper carried a story with the caption, "Janaki's son alone has copyright to MGR's autobiography: court". I provide the first half of this unsigned report.

“The Madras High Court has declared that J. Surendran, son of V.N. Janaki, is the absolute and exclusive owner of the entire copyright of M.G. Ramachandran’s autobiography, ‘Naan Yaen Piranthaen’ (Why I was born). In the judgment allowing a civil suit by Mr. Surendran, the court said since he was admittedly the son of Janaki, his claim to have succeeded to her property was bound to be sustained unless it had been made as a subject matter of bequest by her.

The suit sought a decree that Mr. Surendran was the absolute and exclusive owner of the entire copyright in the work and a permanent injunction restraining Sudha Vijayakumar and Rajaraja Pathipagam, T. Nagar here, and their men, from in any way infringing his copyright either by printing, publishing or trading and to render a true and proper account of the sale proceeds of the book to him. The book had been published in two volumes each costing Rs 350. Mr. Surendran said he was the son of V.N. Janaki, wife of MGR, who was the absolute owner of the copyright. After his demise, the copyright was vested with MGR’s wife, Janaki. Mr. Surendran was born through Ganapathi Bhat, her former husband.

Both MGR and Janaki left behind two wills each; but they had no mention about the book’s copyright. While so, Ms. Sudha Vijayakumar, claiming ownership of the book, printed and published it in 2003. Hence, the present suit was filed in 2004. The defendant claimed that though Janaki became owner of the copyright, on her death, its ownership would revert to the relatives of MGR and not to Mr. Surendran...”

*My common sense interpretation of this case is as follows: As it transpired, (1) MGR was in sound mental health, when he wrote his will. **He did not specifically indicate who will hold the copyright, after his death in his will.** It is rather difficult to believe that MGR, a stickler for details in every aspect of his life, failed to indicate the copyright holder of his ‘writing (that too, his autobiography)’ after him. This by itself provides indirect proof that MGR **did not ‘write’** his autobiography, unlike his fellow contemporaries poet Kannadasan and*

Karunanidhi. After all, MGR gained his fame as a stage and movie actor. In all probabilities, he would have dictated his story to a confidant or to a 'ghost-writer' assigned by the Ananda Vikatan magazine. It is more appropriate to believe that MGR might have felt this 'dictation' was a sort-of public speech delivered to a public audience. Thus, there was no necessity to include this autobiography material, as one of his belongings (personal property including houses and land, personal items and finance) his will. (2) Surendran (Janaki's son by her first husband Ganapathi Bhat) was an adult, when MGR wrote his will in 1987, before his death. If MGR had intended that the copyright of his autobiography should pass to Surendran, he would have made clear indications for it in his will. This being not the case, Surendran's claim to "absolute and exclusive" ownership of MGR's autobiography after MGR's death via her mother's link to MGR is rather tenuous.

Mr. Surendran's arrogance and real intention in blocking the publication of MGR's autobiography also deserves serious condemnation. To a question by Vinoj Kumar in 2004, ['If it is legally established that you are the owner of the copyright of MGR's autobiography, will you publish the book?'] had answered as follows:

"I don't intend to publish the book, for the time being at least. I have to go through the contents of the book carefully first. MGR has written about so many things. It was a totally different situation prevailing at the time when he wrote the book. So many years have passed now. I need to ensure that the contents of his book do not hurt any person. I will publish the book once I am personally satisfied about the contents. If I need to remove some part (from the book), I will not hesitate to do it."

What is Mr. Surendran's intention here? Whose derriere he is trying to cover up? After all, this autobiography had already been published during 1970-72, and those who were living then and felt offended, never raised their objections to MGR in public or filed any lawsuits against MGR or its publisher Ananda Vikatan. So, why this peculiar concern by Mr. Surendran to those offended folks? And who was he to edit the text

of MGR's autobiography? Did MGR give permission to him for serving as his 'unsolicited' special editor?

12 segments from MGR's Autobiography

In 1973, when I was a sophomore at the University of Colombo, the Colombo Public Library held a public auction of old Tamil magazines it had in its stock. I was an eager participant of this auction, and I purchased quite a variety of Tamil magazines in lots that were imported from Tamil Nadu. These included, Ananda Vikatan, Kalaimagal, Kalaikathir, Manjari, Senthamil Selvi and Theepam for bargain prices. As these were randomly arranged, there was no chronological continuity between issues of the same magazine.

Fifty odd pages are devoted to an account of Dr Mani's most famous patient, the late Jayprakash Narayan. Compulsory reading for anyone interested in modern Indian history, this section was written at the express request of the illustrious statesman. Those seeking a similar account on the late chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M G Ramachandran, will be disappointed. Neither he nor his heirs have authorised Dr Mani to narrate that tale, marred as it is by several sordid aspects over which Dr Mani had no control.

Not modest but truthful

There is much more that fascinates in this book — the hilarious tale of the severed limb (p 115), the joy with which the physician looked on the patient who worked in the accountant general's office (p 119), the labour strike by doctors (p 137-9), his Australian experience (chapter 9), the rebuffs most innovative doctors have to face in India (p 157-8), and medicine in a five star hospital in Bombay.

Dr Mani cannot be accused of undue modesty. Statements such as "For most of my life I have been a strict disciplinarian" (p 63) and "I have been a very successful teacher of medicine" (p 125) may jar those who do not know the man. I am more fortunate and can vouch for the fact that the statements ring true.

The printer's devil has left an occasional mark but these are not serious blemishes. Those wishing to learn about medicine in modern India or about the author will find this book revealing, interesting and, in places, hilarious.

1 Mani MK. *Yamaraja's brother. The autobiography of Dr M K Mani*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1989.

book review of Yamaraja's Brother 1990

Luckily for me, the Ananda Vikatan issues of the second half of 1972 that I purchased contained twelve of MGR's autobiography segments [between July 1972 and October 1972], numbering from 120 to 135. As the numbers indicate, by July 1972, his autobiography had appeared for more than two years since 1970, and the last item (no. 135) was a short note to the readers, dated Oct. 27, 1972, that he intends to continue this series. October 1972 was the month, when MGR was expelled from the DMK party. Though he did express this sentiment, I'm not sure that he did continue this autobiography series, as he was pretty busy and tied up in establishing his new party (the Anna DMK) in addition to continuing his career in films.

The 12 segments that I have saved have the following captions [translated from Tamil to English].

No. 120: Representatives of Truth and Relationship

No. 123: Mahatma who woke up the National Spirit

No. 124: Khadi (yarn spinning wheel) Experience and Explanation

No. 126: Gurantee for the Future

No. 127: Mother's Love, Compassion and Advice

No. 128: Thangamani's Spirit

No. 129: Beliefs of Various Types

No. 130: Political Talent

No. 131: A Small Block for a Wish

No. 133: Fire Test

No. 134: If Mothers enter the War for Justice?

No. 135: The Political Path I had Walked

From these 12 segments, I offer excerpts on MGR's poverty-tinged pre-hero years, as he himself had described, in chronological sequence. The caption of No. 128 refers to Thangamani, who was MGR's first wife and who died young.

Excerpts from No.120: Representatives of Truth and Relationship

"I realized that a case has been filed that I had abducted a married woman and kept her under my care; as such to arrest me and file a case. Furthermore, to prevent the shooting of 'Marutha Naatu Ilavarasi'. I didn't have the strength of money, recommendation of elite officials and also the protection of fame. How could I carry this burden?"

If there are any well-healed friends, like these days, even then it remained the same. I didn't have any influential close friends then. My pals were only those who trusted their work and knowledge who did earn some, but failed to save what they earned. Only a few of those who had interest and courage in initiating new jobs were my friends. Even this number became my acquaintances only recently.

*Therefore, I was like a 'lonely tree' to protect myself then. For the job I had in my hand, I earned only a little. I couldn't even say when I'll get a contract for a new movie. If I went to ask for work, it won't be respectable; and it pricked my self-respect. Also, the pay would be lower. I did act as a hero in one movie, but I couldn't create the impression on film producers that 'I am wanted'. I couldn't ask; and they themselves couldn't invite me... **Yes, I was not elevated.**" [dots and bold letters, are as in the original.]*

Actors and singers, however they have talent and skill receive their respect only when people accept them... Then only, they gain fame. After that, the thoughts of such artists in general sometimes become the standard, isn't it! Fundamental to this issue was that, people should first accept their talent. Therefore, any artists have to be raised by the people.

In the belief that God created this world and the living beings, I wish to ask a few questions. There could be only one God in this world. None can contradict this. Only because of the human abilities, there exist variant names and varied formats in praying habits.

In those days, when the big fly-over bridge was not built at Kodambakkam, the railway crossing was frequently closed due to train traffic. Those who cannot cross to the other side had to wait for few hours due to this closure. To escape from this delay, we created a separate route. In two or three furlong distance, there was another gate. Once the train passes, that gate was opened quickly. One need not wait for long. For that route, we named it 'Small Gate'.

If we move along that route, one could reach the Panagal Park in Thiyagaraja Nagar and the nearby Ramakrishna School. On that road, there was a god statue, without any surrounding buildings. In the evening, there wasn't much traffic except for one or two. When we passed that statue, we used to talk, "So, pitiable! No one seems to care this poor God!" A quip by a joker friend answered: "He hasn't reached the 'star value'! If a benefactor took care and provide publicity and made him a 'star', then he'd be a rich God.' Whether he quipped humorously or playfully, after a few years when I passed that route, I noted that a small enclosure had been built around that statue. On top of it, the sounds of nagaswaram and tavil nearby offered pleasing sentiments. Few more years later, I was so surprised. Hundreds of men and women were enjoying the kathakalakshepam (Hindu musical discourse). By watching their silk dresses and ornaments, and listening to their mixture of English and Tamil language, I learnt one truth. That these patrons were of elite class and educated in English.

How could this God receive popularity, who few years ago lied uncared in that surrounding? Even for a God who created humans, only when the latter shows respect, His standing receives elevation. That the same God who was untouched earlier and who we ridiculed as a 'poor God' turned himself as a 'rich God with all the powers' I saw with my two eyes. The same view I heard from my friends." (to be continued).

“One day in the make-up room when we were alone, MGR told the following. ‘Everyone believes that I’m a true Malayalee. I’m telling this to you. That’s wrong! There isn’t anything inferior in identifying oneself as a Malayalee. But, as for me, it is not true. My ancestors belonged to Kongu Nadu region and were from Mandradiar group. Their ancestral town was Pollachi. During the period of Haider Ali who ruled Mysore, he passed an edict that Hindus should convert themselves to Muslims. Scared by this edict, many Hindu families turned into Muslims. Those who were not willing to turn into Muslims, left their ancestral town Pollachi and passed Koimbatore and via Palakkadu valley, settled in the villages around that region. Among those who settled like this, my father’s ancestors was one.’

அன்னையின் பாசம்,

ஏறத்தாழப் பதினைந்து தினங்கள் கழிந்த பின்தான் நான் குணமடைந்தேன். எப்படியோ நான் உயிர் பிழைத்தேன் என்றுதான் சொன்னார்கள். என் தாயார் வேண்டாத கடவுள் இல்லை எனலாம். 'பெற்றவளுக்குத்தானே தெரியும் பிள்ளையின் அருமை' என்பார்கள். ஆனால் தாயை இழந்து விட்ட ஒருவனுக்குத்தானே தெரியும் தாயின் அருமை! அதை நன்கு இப்போதும் இதை எழுதும் இந்த நேரத்திலும் உணருகிறேன். ஒவ்வொரு விநாடியும் உணருகின்றேன். ஒவ்வொரு சந்தர்ப்பத்திலும் உணருகின்றேன்.

நான் வேலையில்லாது கஷ்டப்பட்ட அந்த நாட்களில், என்னை வாழ விடாமற் செய்ய முயன்ற போட்டிகளுக்குக் காரணமான வலிவு மிக்கவர்களை நினைத்து மலைத்துப் போய் 'ஐயோ, இவர்களின் எதிர்ப்பிலிருந்து எப்படி மீளப் போகிறேன்?' என்றெல்லாம் திசைத்து எந்தப் பாதையில் சென்றால் மேலே சொன்னவர்களின் தாக்குதலுக்கு ஆளாகாமல் தப்பிச் செல்ல முடியும் என்று திணறும்போது அதை மிக மிகச் சாதாரணமான ஒரு பிரச்சினையாக்கி "இது கேண்டா இப்படிக்குழம்புறே, 'எந்தக் கல் மடியிலே'ன்னு பெரியவங்க சொல்லி யிருக்காங்க. அதுபோல இப்ப உனக்குத் தொல்லை கொடுக்குறவங்களுக்கு இதைவிடப் பெரிய தொல்லை காத்துக்கிட்டிருக்கு. அப்போ அவங்களுக்குத் தெரியும். இதே நல்லா ரூபகம் வெச்சிக்கிட்டு ஒம்பாட்டுக்கு இருக்கிற வேலையைச் செய். உன் அப்பா வெப் பறி

கொடுத்து உங்களெத் தூக்கிக்கிட்டு வாழப் புறப்பட்டேனே, யாரெ நம்பி, யார் ஆதரவு எதிர்பார்த்து? அப்பொ என் கண்ணுக்குத் தெரிஞ்ச தெல்லாம் ஒரே சூன்யமயமான உலகம்தாண்டா!

இத்தனை வயசு வரைக்கும் உங்களெ வளர்த்தேனே; நீங்களும் ஏதோ நாலு காசு சம்பாதிக்கிறீங்களெ, எப்படி? உங்களெ சரியாப் படிக்க வைக்கக்கூட என்னாலெ முடியலியே; நாம் என்ன செத்தாப் போயிட்டோம்? விதியை நம்பினோம் அதன்படி நடக்கட்டும்னு பேசாமெ நமக்குத்தெரிஞ்ச மாதிரி காரியத்தெ செய்து கொண்டே இருக்கணும். அதில்லே கடவுளெ நம்பறதா இருந்தா, அவனன்றி ஓரணுவும் அசையாதுங்கறது உண்மையாயிருந்தா நம்ம கையிலே எதுவுமில்லேன்னு ஒரேயடியா கடவுள் மேலே பாரத்தெப் போட்டுட்டு உன் காரிய முண்டு, நீ உண்டுன்னு இரு. இந்த இரண்டிலேயும் நம்பிக்கைஇல்லேன்னு உன் அறிவிலெ நம்பிக்கை வெச்சு உன் புத்திக்கு எது சரின்னு படுதோ அதுபோலெ நட. வர்றது நல்லதா இருந்தாலும் கெட்டதா இருந்தாலும் எல்லாத்துக்கும் நீதான் பொறுப்புன்னு துணிஞ்ச நட...

"ஏண்டா, வந்தாவந்தா எதுவரைக்கும் வரும்? தலைக்கு மேலே ஜலம் வந்த பிறகு ஜாண் வந்தாலென்ன, முழம் வந்தாலென்ன? எப்படியும் நீந்தத்தான் வேணும். ஒரு அடிக்காக ஒரு நீச்சலும் பத்தடிக்காக ஒரு நீச்சலுமா நீந்தப் போறோம்... சுழந்தி எங்கேயாவது இருக்குன்னு நடுக்குத் தெரிஞ்சா முன் ஜாக்கிரதையா விலகப் பாக்கணும். சாவை விடப் பயங்கரமான ஒண்ணு நம்மை பயப்படுத்தப் போறதில்லே. அதுக்கே

எம்.ஜி.ஆர்

MGR's Tamil ancestry

In general reference works, MGR had been continuously cited as of Kerala-origin (as a Malayalee). This pattern was reinstated by his friends –turned political rivals (especially poet Kannadasan and DMK leader M.Karunanidhi) and partisan journalists in 1977 for political gains, when MGR contested under his new party label and aimed for the Chief Minister post. But once the Tamil Nadu elected him as their leader, this 'Tamil Nadu for Tamilian' call vanished in thin air during the 1980 and 1984 state assembly elections.

Written evidence for whether MGR was a Tamilian or a Keralite did appear in the memoir of script writer Arurdhas's book 'Naan Mugam Paartha Cinema Kannadigal' [The Cinema Mirrors that I looked at] in 2002. During 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the Tamil movie world (producers, directors, heroines, villains, comedians, script writers and lyricists) was split into two basic camps; MGR camp and Sivaji (Ganesan) camp. It was an unscripted pattern that those belonging to one camp hardly moved to the other. However, due to occasional rifts in personal relationships, and for gains in financial fortunes a few did cross over. Most of the crossovers occurred from Sivaji camp to MGR camp in producer, director ranks (such as B.R. Banthulu, A.P. Nagarajan and C.V.Sridhar).

பரிவு, அறிவுரை!

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நான் ஏன் பிறந்தேன் ?

எப்பவோ நான் தயாரானவ. ஆன இன்னும் நாம் சாகலியே... போய் தைரியமா உன் வேலையைச் செய், போ..” என்று வெகு எளிதாகச் சொல்லி, ஏதோ ஒரு பெரிய, புதிய நம்பிக்கையை உருவாக்கி விடுவார்கள். நாங்களும் குழப்பம் தீர்ந்து அமைதி பெறுவோம்.

அப்படிப்பட்ட தாயே அந்தப் பதினைந்து நாட்களும் நிலை குலைந்து போயிருந்தார்கள் என்பதை அறிந்த நான், அந்தப் பெற்ற வயிற்றை நினைத்து அந்த வயிறு குளிர நான் நடந்து கொள்ள வேண்டுமே என்று எண்ணி நேன். ஆமாம்; எண்ணியது எனது உள்ளத்தின் அடித் தளத்திலிருந்து தூய்மையான, புனிதமான நல்வெண்ணத்தோடுதான். ஆனாலும் இந்த எனது நேர்மையான எண்ணத்தை முழுக்க முழுக்க நிறைவேற்றினேனோ...

இல்லை என்பதை இந்த இடத்தில் ஒப்புக்கொள்ள நான் தயங்கவில்லை. எந்தெந்தக் காரியங்களில் அப்படிப்பட்ட தாயின் மனத்தை நோக்கச் செய்தேன் என்று இன்று நினைத்துப் பார்த்தாலும் எனது உள்ளணர்வு என்னை மன்னிக்க கிறது. மறைந்து தெய்வமாயிருந்து எனக்கு வாழ்வு தரும் அந்தத் தாயும் இப்போது என்னை மன்னிப்பது மட்டுமல்ல; ஆகி கூறி ஆமோதிப்பார்கள் என்று நிச்சயம் நம்புகிறேன்.

தீண்டாமை கூடாது என எதிர்த்தேன். பழமையில் வளர்ந்து பழமையின் எதிரொலியாகத் தன்னை ஆக்கிக் கொண்டு விட்ட என் தாயாருக்குத் தீண்டாமை கூடாது என்பதை ஏற்றுக் கொள்ள இயலவில்லை.



Some tactful artistes (among whom scriptwriter Arurdhas was one) maintained neutrality and did work for both MGR and Sivaji Ganesan. I provide below what Arurdhas had recorded from MGR's mouth.

“One day in the make-up room when we were alone, MGR told the following. ‘Everyone believes that I’m a true Malayalee. I’m telling this to you. That’s wrong! There isn’t anything inferior in identifying oneself as a Malayalee. But, as for me, it is not true. My ancestors belonged to Kongu Nadu region and were from Mandradiar group. Their ancestral town was Pollachi. During the period of Haider Ali who ruled Mysore, he passed an edict that Hindus should convert themselves to Muslims. Scared by this edict, many Hindu families turned into Muslims. Those who were not willing to turn into Muslims, left their ancestral town Pollachi and passed Koimbatore and via Palakkadu valley, settled in the villages around that region. Among those who settled like this, my father’s ancestors was one.’

‘Those who were called Mandradiar in Pollachi, were called ‘Mannadiar’ (in corrupted form) in Palakkadu region. Even now, those Brahmins who live around Palakkadu were originally from Thanjavur and Tirunelvely regions. Majority of those who were addressed as ‘Menon’, ‘Nayar’ and ‘Mannadiar’ were those who settled from Kongu Nadu region! It’s because of this , when someone calls me as a Malayalee, I become angry. These details were told by my mother when I was young’.

Then, Arurdhas continued. To prove this fact, an incident happed on 1962 Dec 7th. During the Congress Party rule, Devar Annan [Sandow M.M. Sinappa Devar, who was one of the chief producers of MGR movies] facilitated electricity supply to Coimbatore Maruthamalai Murugan temple from the base region. Nalla Senapathi Sarkarai Manradiar, the then Minister for Cooperatives, presided this function. MGR willingly requested that the switch to initiate the electricity supply to be given to him. He was offered that opportunity. While speaking on that occasion, he did mention that he too belonged to Kongu Nadu

Mandradiar community. This speech was recorded in tape, and the minister did accept MGR's confession."



Sathyabhama – MGR's mother

Haider Ali (1720-1782) was a remarkable Indian leader in the 18th century who opposed the rule of British East India Company's expansion. This is what Jawaharlal Nehru had recorded about Haider Ali, in his The Discovery of India (1946).

“Haider Ali was a remarkable man and one of the notable figures in Indian history. He had some kind of a national ideal and possessed the qualities of a leader with vision. Continually suffering from a painful disease, his self-discipline and capacity for hard work were astonishing. He realized, long before others did so, the importance of sea power and the growing menace of the British based on naval strength. He tried to organize a joint effort to drive them out and, for this purpose, sent envoys to the Maratha, the Nizam, and Shuja-ud-Dowla of Oudh. But nothing came of this. He started building his own navy and, capturing the Maldiv Islands, made them his headquarters for shipbuilding and naval activities. He died by the way side as he was marching with his army. His son Tipu also sent messages to Napoleon and to the Sultan in Constantinople.”

But, Nehru had omitted the negative traits of Haider Ali in forcing conversions of Hindu families to Muslims, during his rule. Even MGR himself was fascinated by the career of Haider Ali. One never knows whether it was because of the dislocation his ancestors had to face from Pollachi in Tamil Nadu to Kerala region. MGR did announce producing a movie on Haider Ali, after the success of his first venture Nadodi Mannan in late 1950s. Somehow, this venture did not succeed for unannounced reasons.

MGR on his mother Sathyabhama

I provide below, excerpts from MGR’s reminiscences of his mother as they appear in his autobiography (chapter 127) which appeared in the Ananda Vikatan in 1972.

“When I was two or three, mother brushed my teeth. It was beautiful memory. But, somewhat bitter too...Before she completes brushing my teeth, I would receive one or two hits from her daily (Even though it was tinged with love, it did hurt). I had received hits from her because I had bitten her fingers or because I have gulped the water given to gargle.”



ஆயிரத்துத் தொள்ளாயிரத்து முப்பதாம் ஆண்டு என்று நினைவு. காரைக்குடியில், மதுரை ஓரிஜினல் பாய்ஸ் கம்பெனியார் நாடகம் நடத்திக் கொண்டிருந்த நேரம். நான் அந்தக் கம்பெனியில்தான் முதன் முதலாக நடிகளுக்கிச் சேர்ந்து தொழில் செய்யப் புகுந்தவன் என்பதையும், இடையில் பர்மாவிற்கு வேறொரு நாடகக் குழுவில் சேர்ந்து நடிக்கச் சென்று மீண்டும் தமிழ்நாடு திரும்பிப் பழைய எனது தொழில்துறைத் தொடர்பின் ஆணைவேரான மதுரை ஓரிஜினல் பாய்ஸ் கம்பெனியிலேயே தொடர்ந்து நடிக்கத் தொடங்கியிருந்தேன் என்பதையும் முன்னமேயே வேறொரு இடத்தில் குறிப்பிட்டுள்ளேன்.

மதுவிலக்குப் பிரசார நாடகமான 'பதிபக்தி', வரதட்சிணைக் கொடுமையை விளக்கும் 'இராஜேந்திரன்' நாடகம், விருப்பமில்லாத பெண்ணைப் பணத்துக்காக நோய் பிடித்த ஒருவருக்கு மனைவியாக்க முயன்றதன் விளை

வாக அந்தப் பெண் வீட்டைவிட்டு ஓடுவதையும் அதனால் விளையும் கெடுதலையும் தெளிவாக்கும்.

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'இராஜாம்பாள்' என்ற நாடகம், காங்கிரஸ் தொண்டனான ஒருவனுக்கு ஏற்படும் ஆபத்துக்களையும், ஆயினும் அந்தத் தொண்டன் நியாயத்தின் முன் வெற்றி காணுவதையும் தெளிவுபடுத்தும். 'கதிர்பக்தி' நாட்டு விடுதலைப் போராட்டத்தில் அன்று 'பகத்சிங்', 'ராஜகரு', 'சுகதேவ்' இவர்களின் துணிவு முயற்சியை மறைமுகமாக வேறு பெயர்களில் விளக்கும்.

'பஞ்சாப் கேசரி' என்ற நாடகமும் மேலும் பல புராண நாடகங்களும் நடத்தப்பட்டன.

காரைக்குடியில் மக்கள் உட்காரும் நாற்காலிகளோ மற்ற

In this part, I provide materials on MGR's mentors, as he had described in his autobiography. Foremost among the real mentors was his mother Sathyabama, about whom I presented some details in part 3. I provide translations of his autobiographical chapters (parts 123, 124 and 126). In colloquial spoken Tamil, the word Annan/Anne is used frequently. Literally it means 'elder brother'. It is a courtesy or endearing address form which can be used to anyone to whom one feels as older than himself. Rather than translating this Anne into the cumbersome two-word 'elder brother', I opt to use 'elder'.

January 31st being the 65th death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi (18969-1948), MGR had titled chapter 123 as 'Mahatma who woke up National Spirit'. It is not an exaggeration to state that Mahatma Gandhi did serve as a vicarious mentor for MGR; not in promoting violence in drama and movie forms, which MGR perfected, or in promoting vegetarianism. But, Gandhi did serve as a vicarious mentor for MGR, in some personal habits such as non-preference for alcohol, non-violence against women, promoting women's welfare in the society and banishing illiteracy.

In chapter 123, MGR includes few details about his two mentors of the stage drama period (K.P. Kesavan, and Kali N. Ratnam). These two pioneers of Tamil stage drama, did appear in early Tamil talkies (films) during 1930s and 1940s, but failed to leave their strong imprints. Kesavan acted in movies which were originally his drama plots such as Pathi Bakthi (1936) and Punjab Kesari (1938). After the 1939 movie Bombay Mail, Kesavan lost his hero opportunities gradually and did appear ten years later in subsidiary roles in movies like Ratnakumar (1949) and Viduthalai (1954). Kali N. Ratnam, who was a martial arts trainer for MGR in his drama troupe during early 1930s, later switched to comedian role in the Tamil movies and his movie career lasted until 1950.

Mentors who shaped MGR's stage drama period

Here is the complete translation of chapter 123 of MGR's autobiography. In this, MGR mentions about the character and cultural traits of 'nagarathar' community, who are the chettiars (mercantile bankers) in Tamil Nadu.

"I remember it as around 1930. It was when the Madurai Original Boys Company was staging a drama in Karaikudi. That I joined that company for the first time as an actor, and then traveled to Burma under the sponsorship of another company; subsequently, rejoined the Madurai Original Boys company as it was my professional root-base. had mentioned in a previous occasion.

உணர்வுகளில் போடப்படும் துற்றகாலிகளுக்கு முற்றிலும் மாறுபட்டவை யாக இருந்தன. வேறு ஊர்களில் சோபாக்கள் அல்லது கைப்பிடி வைக்கப்பட்ட நாற்காலிகள் இவ்வாறு இருக்கும். ஆனால் நான் அன்று அங்கு கண்டவை வேறுவித நாற்காலிகளாகும். சாய்வு நாற்காலி (Easy Chair) என்று சொல்லொளாமே, அத்தகையவைதாம் அங்கு போடப்பட்டிருக்கும். தரையில் உட்காருபவர்களைத் தவிர மற்ற ஏனை யோர் சாய்வு நாற்காலியில் தான்

நான் ஏன் பிறந்தேன்?

போது இளமையில் எனது மனத்தில் வேரூன்றிப் போன நல்ல எண்ணம், மரியாதை ஆகியவை மேலும் பன்மடங்கு உயர்ந்தன என்பதை நான் வெளிப்படுத்தாதிருக்க இயலவில்லை.

அத்தகைய நகரத்தார்களிடம் பார்க்க விரும்பி வந்தாலும் தங்களது பழக்க வழக்கங்களுக்கு மாறாக எதையும் அனுமதிக்க மாட்டார்கள். அவர்களுடைய வீட்டுப் பெண்கள் நாற்காலியில் அமர்ந்து அப்போது நான் பார்த்ததே இல்லை.

நான் இப்படியும் ஒரு சேதியைக் கேள்விப் பட்டேன். வேறொரு ஸ்டெஷன் நாடகம் நடந்து கொண்டிருந்ததாம். அதைக் காண நகரத்தார்கள் நிறையப் போர் வந்திருந்தார்களாம்.

நகரத்தார்களுக்கிடையில் வெளியூரிலிருந்து வந்த ஒரு பெண்! வந்து உட்கார்ந்து நாடகம் பார்த்தாராம். முதலில் இதை யாரும் கவனிக்க வில்லையாம். இப்படி ஒரு நிகழ்ச்சி நடைபெறவே முடியாத ஒன்று என அவ்வளவு நம்பிக்கையோடிருந்ததனால் அதைக் கவனிக்க வில்லை போலும்.

அந்த அம்மையாரைப் பார்த்து விட்ட ஒருவர் உடனே எழுந்து ஆத்திரத்தோடு மற்றவர்களிடம், “இந்தக் காமாதிரி நிலையிலே நமக்கு நாடகம் ஒரு கேடா?” என்று பொருள் படக் கேட்டாராம். சிறிது நேரத்திற்கெல்லாம் கொட்டகையே காலியாகி விட்டதாம்.

இப்படி நடந்ததோ இல்லையோ, ஆனால் நகரத்தார்தங்கள் கட்டுப்பாட்டுக்கும் தங்களுடைய வழக்கத்திற்கும் மாறாக எது நடப்பதையும்

தேசிய உணர்ச்சியைத் தூண்டிய மகாத்மா!

எம். ஜி. ஆர்.

உட்காருவார்களில். அதாவது அந்த ஊரில் வாழும் பெரும்பாலானவர்கள் என்று சொல்லப்பட்ட. ‘நகரத்தார்’ என்று அழைக்கப்பட்ட சமூகத்தார், நாடகக் கலைக்கு மிகுந்த அக்கறையும் ஆதரவும் தந்து வந்தவர்கள் ஆவர். ஆனால் தன்மான உணர்ச்சி மிக்கவர்கள் என்றும், அவர்களுக்கெதிராக சில பழக்க வழக்கங்களைப் பண்பாட்டின் தொகுப்பாகச் செயல்படுத்தி வந்தனர் என்றும் பெரியவர்கள் பேசுவதைப் பலமுறை கேட்டு அறிந்திருந்தேன். எனது அந்த இளமைப் பருவத்திலேயே நகரத்தார் என்றழைக்கப் படுபவர்களைப் பற்றி ஒரு நல்ல எண்ணமும் மரியாதையும் எனது உள்ளத்தில் பதிந்து விட்டிருந்தன.

சில பல் ஆண்டுகளுக்குப் பின் காஞ்சியில் ‘நகரத்தார்’களின் தமிழ்ச் சேவையை, தமிழைப் பக்திப் பாடல்களின் வாயிலாக வளர்த்த முறையை, அன்ன சத்திரங்கள், கோயில்கள், பள்ளிகள்—என்று பல்வேறு தருமங்களைச் செய்தவர்கள் என்ற வரலாற்றிலும்—இவற்றை யெல்லாம் படித்த

‘Pathi Bakthi’ – the propaganda drama for alcohol prohibition, ‘Rajendran’ – the drama describing the trauma of dowry system, where a woman was forced to marry a diseased man and as a result was forced to run away from home.

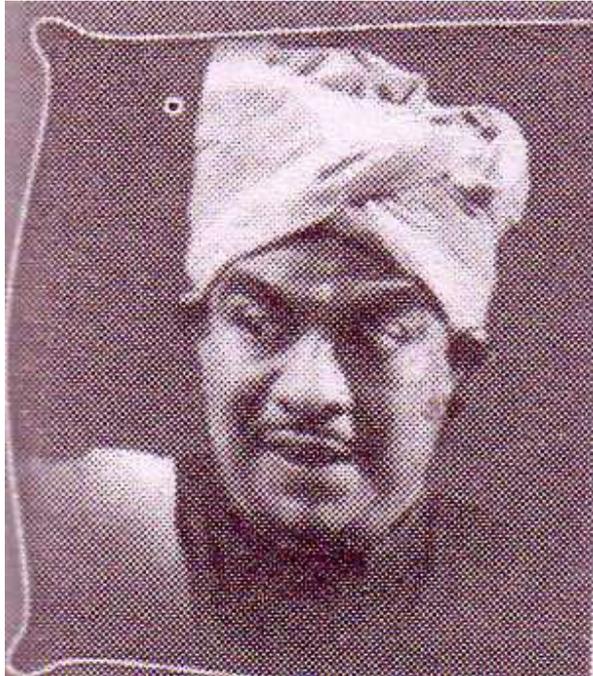
‘Rajambal’ – the drama about the accidents suffered by a devotee of Congress [independence] movement and who ultimately prevails against the logic. ‘Kadar Bhakti’ – the drama which tells the nation’s independence struggle and the heroic efforts of Bagat Singh, Rajaguru and Sugadev. And also ‘Punjab Kesari’, as well as other religious dramas were staged.

The chairs placed for customers’ convenience at Karaikudi were completely different from other drama sites. Other towns had sofas and armed chairs. But, what I saw then was a different type. What we call as ‘easy chair’ was the type (used in Karaikudi). Other than those who sat in the ground, the rest were seated in ‘easy chairs’. The majority who lived in that town were the ‘Nagarathar’ community. They were good patrons of drama art form. But, I have heard from elders so many times that they (this community) had self-pride and entertained special cultural traits.

After few years when I learned the Tamil service offered by ‘Nagarathar’ in Kanjipuram, how they propagated Tamil via devotional songs, ‘soup kitchens’, temples and primary schools and served as patrons for other welfare activities, I cannot express that the good sentiments and respect which were firmly held in my young mind multiplied many folds. Those ‘Nagarathar’, even when they attend drama with wish, will not permit any trait that was against their belief. In those days, I had never seen their women seated in a chair. I also heard this story A ‘special’ drama was staged somewhere. To watch it, quite many ‘Nagarathar’ folks had gathered. Among those, there was a ‘foreign’ woman who was seated. [Note by Sachi: MGR had used the word ‘VeLLiyur’; it may mean a foreigner or an outsider to the community, though an Indian.] At first, none noticed this. It could not happen was the prevalent belief then.

After noticing that woman, one guest stood up in anger and queried, 'In this sort of insult, why do we need a drama?' Within few minutes, the entire audience had vanished. Whether this really happened or not, it ascertained that the message 'Nagarathar' never permitted something to happen that was against their tradition and control was true!

In case, if there were any characters in the drama that insulted the 'Nagarathar' beliefs, when such a drama was staged at Karaikudi town, caution was taken to self-sensor such dialogue. In the 'Kovalan' [Note by Sachi: In the Silappadikaram epic composed by poet Ilango Adigal dated around 2nd-3rd century AD, hero Kovalan belonged to the 'Nagarathar' community.] drama, there occurs the scenario of the dance accompanist (nadduvanar character) who was with courtesan Madhavi making fun of hero Kovalan, and Kovalan himself returning the volley. Similarly, Madhavi's words about the character of 'Nagarathar' community shrewdly earning money with double-entendres are included as well. In turn, if Kovalan sings and deliver dialogue insulting the courtesan's traits and duplicity and insults them, he would be delivered with gold rings, gold chains, medals etc.



Kali N. Ratnam

These 'Nagarathar' folks gave priority to self-respect. They did patronize our 'Punjab Kesari' drama. In that drama, Mr. K.P. Kesavan played the hero role of Ranjit Singh. In it, there were scenes having sharp blade fight [note by Sachi: As I mentioned earlier, K.P. Kesavan was a mentor in martial arts for MGR. the Tamil word is 'katthi sandai', with 'katthi' meaning knife. I prefer to translate it as sharp blade fight rather than knife fight. MGR was an exponent in this type of ancient Tamil martial art, in addition to sword fight and silambam art – bamboo staff.], bomb throwing and gun fight. Mr. K.P. Kesavan learnt sharp blade fight from tutor Mr. Kandasamy Appa of Chennai. When he raises one leg and slides the other leg while at the same time twirling the sword, the drama tent will shake!

Mr. K.P. Perumal played the role of rival. There wasn't anyone as a good guy like him in the drama stages. He was without any bad habits; he wouldn't even use betel for chewing. In case, if he used it occasionally, we would say, it would be a 'world surprise'. He wouldn't even let his dress hang below the knee. He wouldn't even ask money from anyone; at the same time, he wouldn't even lend to anyone. His firm belief was that, rather than giving money first to someone and then haggle over it later and suffer from heartaches, it's better to say 'No' at first. At the company, those who earn a little, occasionally do suffer from cash flow problems. Even then, no one will ask money from him. 'He won't give; why unnecessarily go and bother him?' was the prevailing sentiment. None would entertain any ill feeling about him, merely because he won't give. He was scared to act in fight scenes. He don't like anyone forcefully landing on him or anyone pressing him. As much as possible, he would opt to avoid scenes in which he had to fall. However, occasionally he does suffer from hits.

In the drama 'Pathi Bakthi', [Perumal] acted as a villain. In the last scene, he had to fight spy Govindan (Late Mr. Kali N. Ratnam played this role). Mr. Kali N. Ratnam is an exponent of boxing, silambam and wrestling to an extent. He was the company's tutor in such martial arts, and he would act daringly. As such, the situation of Perumal looked

pathetic. One day, such a scene was done with. I was undressing the costume in the 'powder place' (In those days, we used to call make-up room like that.) Mr. K.K. Perumal called me with a depressing tone. He was seated in a box, and asked me to check his leg. 'What's the matter Elder?' I asked with concern. He showed me his leg. There was a depression with a red line in his shinbone or tibia below knee joint. He cried and said, 'Look. Bone had bent!' I couldn't stop laughing. I laughed. He was upset: 'I'm crying, and laughing' he repeated with tears. I had to soothe him. 'Elder! Bone will break, but not bend!' I told. He repeated: 'For you, it won't bend.. Look here, what's this? It shows the bend.'



Master Vithal in Alam Ara

I re-stated the fact, 'That depression was caused by the rope tied to keep the leg guard in place, and not because of the bent bone.' First, he didn't believe my words. Later, he realized his error. He was a scared actor, who was forced to take the role of villain. How could he withstand sharp blade fight? If he said, 'he can't', that's it! There were many who were waiting in line to take the villain role, and like an eagle they would pick the role from him. Therefore, he could not say 'No'. He did fight scenes with a scary mind. As they say, 'the chaser will be happy, if he

sees the other guy running away from him'. The scare of Mr. K.K. Perumal makes Mr. K.P. Kesavan delightful. As I mentioned earlier, he [Kesavan] would fight with his 'signature' sliding leg in the stage.

One day, while this scene was staged, one boot from Mr. K.P. Kesavan did come lose and landed on the patron's section. We got scared. If any 'Nagarathar' was insulted like this, then we couldn't even stage a drama in their town. This was our concern. As we anticipated, that boot had hit a Chettiar. But, that guy took the boot and threw it towards Mr. K.K. Perumal and shouted loudly, 'Kesava, beat him with that boot as well.' The sentiments were, 'Those who were working against nation's independence deserve beating'. Mr. Kesavan had beaten Mr. Perumal with the boot, while fighting with sharp blade. It had mistimed. [That patron] sincerely believed that what he did was what Mr. Kesavan was intended to do...



M.R. Radha

Like this, it was Mahatma who instilled the freedom spirit among the natives and led the freedom struggle and was able to witness the day of independence. Mahatma incorporated discipline with truth. How that philosophy is surviving now? I'd say it had suffered badly with times. Gandhian principles exist in words, but in deeds it do not exist. Even those who study his words can be counted in fingers. Even those who are studying that do so in depressed mood to straighten their thoughts, but not to inspire others lives.

Mahatma was the first one in this civilized world to bind politics, mind control, truth and nonviolence. Because the poor cannot afford to dress, he himself adopted 'lesser dress' style as his life principle. Now, let's see. Now his friends are using the name of Mahatma for gains but not to share the helplessness and the bad luck of others. If there are none, why it is so? If they exist, where are they?"

From time immemorial, 'nagarathar' (chettiers) community was the promoters of Tamil Hindu culture in the South and Southeast Asian countries. A relevant point mentioned by MGR about the lowly status of women folks among the chettiar community 80 years ago, induces me to comment on the onomastics of Sinhalese surnames. Among the Sinhalese, we note surnames such as Hettiarachchy and Hettige. Their paternal ancestors belonged to Tamil-speaking Chetty (being corrupted into Hetti in Sinhalese) community. As these chetties crossed the sea within the last 500 years, without their women counterparts (as there was a taboo among women crossing the sea in boats), for matrimonial comfort they took Sinhalese women as their wives.

M.R. Radha as a mentor in stage drama

Apart from K.P. Kesavan and Kali N. Ratnam, MGR also considered M.R. Radha (1907-1979) as one of his mentor in Tamil stage drama. This MGR mentions in the subsequent chapter 124 of his autobiography. Later, in 1950s and 1960s, M.R. Radha did share the billing in numerous MGR movies as a character actor and a villain. Then, he gained notoriety on January 12, 1967, by shooting MGR at latter's

house and attempting to commit suicide. I provide translation excerpts from chapter 124 below. Note that the Sri Murugan movie was released in 1946, a year before MGR's debut as a hero.

“While acting in the movie ‘Sri Murugan’, I played the Lord Siva role. Though I did train in dancing at young age during my drama company days, I couldn't learn dancing properly due to lack of opportunities. Thus, while playing the Lord Siva role, from our ‘tutor’ (dance teacher Mr. K. R. Kumar) I received dance training daily. If there was no shooting after 5 pm, we had dance training in the evening as well. In those days, shooting time (that is, what is called ‘call sheet’ now) was between 10:00 am and 5:00 pm. While learning dance, I also learnt the technique of Gandhi's spinning wheel method by hands from tutor Mr. Kumar.

That spinning wheel experience did teach me so many principles, explanations and lessons. In the acting profession which I had accepted willingly, so many ‘defeats’ or ‘losses’ were circling me then. What they call ‘musical chairs’? My job prospects were like that then. When the music stops, those who were circling immediately grab a chair near them to be seated, isn't it? Like this, there were so many who competed with me who had brimming art talent.

Though they were speedy and were more talented than me, occasionally they do slip. Or in excess thirst for opportunities, they leave the nearest chair for another chair. Occasionally, it turns out like the ‘rabbit and tortoise’ story.

While the Madurai Original Boys Company was staging ‘Kadar Bhakthi’ and ‘Pathi Bakthi’ dramas for more than two years or so. It was a routine event when one actor from one company moving to another company. But, if the fate of one company depends on the efforts of a particular actor, that actor shifting to another company is not so easy. If the boys are young, they can be threatened and stopped. But what can one do, if the actors have matured? Furthermore who can do

anything to an actor who is courageous, independence spirit, acting talent and self-respect?

When I was acting with Madurai Original Boys Company, it was talked among boys that such a well-known actor who had earned name in another company, will join ours. Our mentor/trainer Late Mr. Kali N. Ratnam was well known for his spy role in the drama Pathi Bakthi. Suppose if another actor who had covered such a role in another company entered ours, who will play that particular role?

Even if a drama company is playing so many miles far, the status of such companies, their drama plots, entire list of actors who feature in such dramas will become available to us. The spies who are in the government will lose out to the spies (scouts) kept by such companies. Like this, the fame of this particular actor who will join our company had become popularized. ‘He acts so naturally in fighting scenes. He could handle any character. He is not scared of anyone. He will not comply with any disciplinary methods. He also moves effortlessly with all..’ Like this we have heard so many stories. Eventually, he arrived; a head full of hair, muffler in neck, coat, veshti and slipper (as dress). fast walker and loud talker. He would laugh loud and talk without any inhibition. Within few days, he had changed the mood of company house. Yes, he was the incomparable Mr. M.R. Radha elder.”

Unfortunately, I don’t have the subsequent part 125 of MGR’s autobiography in my collection. But, in part 126, MGR continues the working style of his real mentors K.P. Kesavan, Kali N. Ratnam and M.R. Radha. In addition, he also describes his passion for the stunts of vicarious mentor Master Vithal (? – 1969), a silent movie star from North India. Master Vithal’s year of birth is unknown.

Master Vithal, the vicarious mentor

“I believe that I was 10 years old. In those days, among the silent movies I had seen, my hero was Mr. Master Vithal. All others come only after him. We don’t know whether he was married or not. But, even after

many years, he was promoted as Master Vithal. Even we used to say, 'There's this Master Vithal film. Shall we go to see it?'

Many had acted in sharp blade fight scenes. In Hindi movies, they use the curved (like the Rajput sword) blade for fight scenes... The manner in which Master Vithal swings and swirls the sharp blade with his hands was a beauty. By watching his footsteps, we can imagine how his arms swirl with the blade. Though I learnt these techniques later, around that time, his cavalier sword play, his round face with sharp nose and the head scarf did fascinate me a lot....

Like this, my vicarious mentor for fight scenes was one and only Master Vithal. After watching his sharp blade fight movies, I gained an interest and inspiration in sharp blade fighting. However, I never got an opportunity to learn the skill directly from him. And I also didn't make an effort for such. Maybe, if I might have attempted and failed is not a surprise at all. Wherever there were short sticks like the size of a cane, they found a spot near my pillow. That night itself, I used imaginary practice with that short stick as a sharp blade, and pretended like Mr. Master Vithal. For many days, I lost!

It was a beauty to see Mr. Master Vithal carrying a shield in one hand and a sharp blade in the other hand. Those who haven't learnt fighting techniques with sword or silambam properly, we unfortunately see them hanging the shield down and use sharp blade for defense. I cannot blame them. Even their tutors (Masters) make the same errors adequately."

The Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema describes Master Vithal as the best Marathi and Hindi stunt star. He had first starred in silent movies since 1924, and later starred in India's first talkie, Alam Ara that was released on March 14, 1931 in Bombay. Master Vithal did continue to act well into 1960s, playing minor roles in Marathi films, before his death in 1969. Raheja and Kothari had recorded that among the three silent movie stars who starred in maximum silent films produced in Bombay during 1920s "the athletic Master Vitthal could put up dazzling

displays of swordplay in swashbucklers and was the stunt king of Sharda studios. He was paid the princely salary of 1,500 rupees a month.” One of the three silent movie stars of 1920s, was P.K. Raja Sandow (1894-1943) – a Tamilian from Putu Koddai, Tamil Nadu, who made waves in Bombay! His given name was P.K. Nagalingam.

As the Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema in its pen sketch on MGR (extending over one page) casually dismisses the actor’s pre-hero days in one sentence [“Screen debut for Ellis R.Dungan (1936); first major starring role in A,S,A.Sami’s Rajakumari (1947)”], I opted to cover this period of his life in more detail based on his recorded impressions.

The previous chapter (chapter 126: Gurantee for the the Future) ended with an anecdote when the young MGR (aged ~10) was infected with cholera while their drama troupe was at Vellor. As such, in the following chapter 127, MGR reminisced about his mother’s love, compassion and advice. I provide some segments in translation.

“I recovered after 15 days or so. They said, I’ve survived. Mother prayed for my life to all the Gods. They say, ‘Only the one who gave birth knows the worth of a child’. But, only those who had lost their mothers learn the worth of a mother! I realize it well even now. Every second I feel it. In every circumstance I feel it.

When I was suffering from unemployment in those days, when I was defeated in the life’s struggles and felt how I could not withstand these powerful folks, and when I suffered in mind, ‘Oh My God! How can I escape from these strong forces’ and when I struggled about choosing the routes which were helpful for me to escape from such forces, [mother] made such struggles so lightly by quipping ‘Why do you worry about such things boy?’ Elders have told us ‘The stone you throw returns to your lap’ [One reaps what one sows]. Those who illtreats you now will suffer for such things later. Then, they will realize. Just remember it and do your job. After I lost your dad, with what strength did I carry you two to survive? Who supported me? Then what I saw with my eyes was merely an empty (cipher) world. Until now I brought

you up. You two are earning something, how's that? I couldn't even educate both of you. Have we died now?'

'If we believed the fate, we just have to continue what we do. If not, if you believe in the God, you place your life on his hands and you do what you feel. If you don't believe these two routes, just believe in your insight and do what you think is right. Whatever you reap, whether it's good or bad, you trust yourself and walk with courage...'

'Boy! Whatever happens, how far it'll come to hurt? Once the water is above your head, why care whether it's a feet above or yards above? You have to swim somehow ain't it?...Just take note of where the swirls lie and carefully avoid them. There is nothing worse than facing death. I was even prepared for that. But, I haven't died yet! Go and do your work.'

These words enabled me to gain new strength, and we become relieved from such advice. Even such a mother was lost in her mind during those fifteen days I suffered from cholera. After feeling such compassion I made up my mind not to hurt her kindness. Yes, it was my heart-felt sentiments. However, did I comply with my sentiments faithfully?

I'm strong enough to say 'No'. In whatever decisions I had hurt the feelings of my mother, when I look back, I feel very small. I hope and believe that my mother who had passed away and guides me as a God will excuse my transgressions and give her blessings.

I did oppose un-touchability. My mother who grew up in ancient traditions and who echoed those old standards could not accept that un-touchability is bad."

MGR as an extra in M.K.T. Bagavathar's hit movie *Ashok Kumar* (1941)



எம்.கே. தியாகராஜ பாகவதர்

M.K. Thyagaraja Bagavatha

I provide an example in which MGR had described an incident to his co-worker about his poverty-tinged pre-hero days. Mayavaram Krishnamoorthy Thyagaraja Bagavathar (M.K.T. Bagavathar, 1910-1959) was the singing star hero of Tamil cinema from mid 1930s to late 1940s. His seventh movie Ashok Kumar was released in 1941. In it, MGR appeared in a small role. In a short biography of Bagavathar first published in 1983, authored by Vindhana (a pen name), the following description appears.

“Famous director Mr. Raja Chandrasekhar directed this movie in which Mr. MGR appears in a small role as Mahendran. Having this as an excuse, whenever this movie is released in re-runs now, those who advertise boldly announce, ‘Ashok Kumar, starring MGR’”. This sort of announcement hurts the sentiments of Bagavathar’s siblings and the fans. I do know about this. Mr. Shanmugam, a sibling of Bagavathar did tell me, ‘I’m at a loss how MGR permits this sort of twisted advertisement, when he is such a great person.’ I responded: ‘He may not be aware of this. If he knows, he would definitely not allow it to happen. Others may opt to share the glory from someone else’s achievement. But, how could MGR have such meanness?’

For this Bagavathar biography, famous Tamil comedian in stage and movies, K.A.Thangavelu had contributed a foreword. Thangavelu himself had appeared in numerous MGR movies. What he had cryptically noted reveals that M.K.T. Bagavathar was not a saint himself. I reproduce Thangavelu’s cryptic remarks in translation.

“The author of this book, while writing about the ‘King of Seven Notes’ (a title carried by Bagavathar) had omitted specifically the names of artistes so as not to offend them, but at the same time had mentioned small errors in their behaviors so that such little offenses could be corrected by others who follow the same path. Like this, it is my wish that there should be a history book for other well-known artistes who created history in the film world.”

This was vintage Thangavelu, who gained recognition for his subtle nuance and twang in dialogue delivery. It appears to me that Thangavelu did know that Bagavathar might have hurt the chances of other minor contemporary actors (among which MGR was one) by his high handedness. Proof for this did appear in one of MGR’s co-worker’s reminiscences about MGR. Kaja Muhaideen (having a pen name K.Ravindar) was that co-worker who worked in MGR Pictures as a script writer. Between 1992 and 1995, in the Tamil movie magazine Bhommai he wrote a 30-part series on MGR. He was introduced to MGR by none other than comedian Thangavelu. In the

20th part of this series, Ravindar provides the following episode, under caption 'Thank You'. The word, hero refers to MGR.

"In the morning, I go to Ramavaram to see hero. If it's evening, I go to Arkadu Mudali Road. For two days an old lady was waiting at Arkadu Mudali road. On the first day, I couldn't identify her. On the second day, she asked, 'Are you the Nagore boy, who was in N.P. Abdul Kadar house?' I watched her face curiously and was dumbfounded. Before that, she herself introduced her; 'I'm the wife of Bagavathar'. My eyes teared. In those days she was full of beauty with gem stones dangling in her body. Now, her skin had darkened and lifeless. I felt pity. 'Amma, why you are here?' I asked.

'Thambi, I wanted to see MGR. No one listens to me. If you could tell him, please let him know. I'm standing here for two days with pain.'

It was not my job to notice who were standing at the entrance, who leaves. On that day, I reluctantly put that message to him. He asked, 'Do you know her?'

I said, 'Yes, It was N.P. Abdul Kadar who introduced me to M.K. Radha elder; he was the one who brought me to the cinema world. During that time, when I was idling, I stand in the Thanam and Co. wrist-watch shop owned by Kadar elder. Then, both Bagavathar and this lady do visit the shop. Even now, she was the one who identified me.'

He said, 'Yes, for one reason I have made her stand there. You go and do your job.'

Within one week, I learnt from newspaper that one lakh (100,000) rupees were offered from personal funds to Bagavathar family, and the road in which Bagavathar's house was located and an art theater was named after Bagavathar. Hero was the one who had done this. There was a photo in which hero was featured with Bagavathar family. As it was his habit in doing something without announcement, I didn't feel this was such a big matter. After hero arrived, I went to see him.

'Howdy? Did you read the paper? Did you see the story about Bagavathar?' he asked.

'Yes', I quipped.

'Are you satisfied now?' he asked.

When I replied, 'What's here about my satisfaction?', he responded.

*'Ravindar, I wanted that lady to realize how times change. She stood only for two days. Even for that, she felt so hurt. Do you know, how many days I had stood in their house compound? In that Askok Kumar movie, the role of me playing Bagavathar's friend was strongly opposed Bagavathar and his wife who complained to Rajah Chandrasekhar. Even then there were Elder and Younger siblings. Chandrasekhar was the elder, and T.R. Ragunath was the younger. Because of the kind heartedness of those two, I got to play that role! **Just because you are on top now, one shouldn't undermine others' opportunities**', he said."*

Influence of Kali N Ratnam and M.R. Radha

In my opinion, MGR's autobiographical chapter 126 is an important one. In it, he had paid compliments and his professional debt to Madras Rajagopala Naidu Radhakrishnan (aka M.R.Radha). Considering the fact that M.R. Radha shot MGR on January 12, 1967, which resulted in the latter losing his voice, usually one wouldn't expect an open tribute to an individual who had plotted to kill you. Nevertheless, while writing his autobiography in the latter half of 1972, MGR did express gratitude and showed magnanimity in recognizing the lessons he learnt from M.R. Radha while the latter was a fellow colleague of MGR at the Madurai Original Boys Company in early 1930s.



M.R. Radha

I provide translations of chapter 126 below, excluding the first 7 paragraphs (which were of general introduction). But, the first paragraph does make sense, after one reads the entire chapter. I comment about it, at the end. In the original, MGR had abbreviated the names of Kali N. Ratnam (as K.N.R.) and M.R. Radha (as M.R.R.) and as these two were seniors to him, address them with the honorific 'Mr' before their initials.

“One leader presents his objectives from a corner of a country. Let us think that he shows by deeds practically how one should live. Those who haven't seen this leader do follow the same precepts and we do see how they change themselves a 'good person'. Like this, Mr. M.R. Radha did act for Madurai Original Boys Company for a few months and moved to other companies. Now, when I write this series, I couldn't have imagined [then] that I'll get this opportunity to write. Similarly, he also

couldn't have imagined then. I was merely one of the boys in his eyes then. That's all.

He [i.e., M.R.R.] couldn't have even imagined that he did show me a new route in my acting life then. When I played the hero roles in the dramas like Manoharan, Sathiavaan, Bharathan of that company and was treated as a 'valuable boy' and had to lose my voice during puberty, I was troubled about what roles I had to choose. In that circumstance, he wouldn't have known that the roles originated by him did offer me good opportunity and also a guaranty for future progress.

In the Pathi Bakthi drama, the hero was played by Mr. K.P. Kesavan, the villain (Gangatharan) was Mr. K.K. Perumal, and the important spy role was played by Mr. Kali N. Ratnam. Mr. M.R.R. had played the villain Gangatharan role and the spy role for other companies and gained respect. Thus, Mr M.R.R. had to play in any one of the roles in our company. Mr. Kali N. Ratnam's role cannot be taken, unless if he was willing. Mr. Perumal was the permanent villain, and he knew the Pathi Bakthi drama's plot vivaciously.

Even though if the story remains the same, if it is staged by different drama troupes, subtle variations can be noticed. But, the nucleus of the story as well as the climax scenes will not change. Thus, Mr. M.R.R. had to pick up another role. But, in that drama there were no alternative roles and this worried Mr. Kali N. Ratnam. The date for Pathi Bakthidrama was announced. On that day, Mr. M.R.R. opted to play the role of a handy man to the villain. He did act in the Veeramuthu (handyman to villain) role.

Until that day, many in the company knows the Veeramuthu name; but cannot visualize the role. When the villain Mr. Perumal announces, 'Veeramuthu, will you go quickly and finish that job?' Anyone among the clique of villain, could play that role if he had quick instinct. But, on that particular day, [due to the deeds of M.R.R.] the Veeramuthu role had gained prominence. Not only that, Veeramuthu was competing with the villain for acceptance. In specific scenes, when both Veeramuthu and

Gangatharan appeared, Veeramuthu gained respect from the audience by the way he spoke and how he switched the cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other. In every movement of his body, he attracted the audience tremendously.

In the climax scene of that drama, the spy had to fight with enemies to save the heroine and her child. Once the villain loses the fight, his handy men would appear, and fight. Mr. Kali N. Ratnam (as the spy) had to beat and defeat the handy men. On the day, when Mr. M.R. R. played the Veeramuthu role, he had told to Mr. Kali N. Ratnam that after Gangatharan (villain) had lost, he will appear and [Mr. Ratnam] had to lift Veeramuthu first. Then, the fight should continue. For this scene, Mr. K.N. R. had to bend slightly so that Mr. M.R.R. comes running and jumps up after pouncing on the former's shoulder. Instantly, Mr. K.N.R. had to grab the waist of Mr. M.R.R. and carry the latter and throw. He did instruct such a scene with the aid of another boy. But, none could pick on Mr. K.N. R. like that in a stage. Those who did that, cannot stay in the company!



K Ravindar biography of MGR 2009

That day, when Pathi Bakthi was staged, in the climax scene, after Gangatharan had lost the fight, entered Mr. M.R.R. running towards the stage. He screamed 'Daii'! [Note by Sachi: This third person singular masculine word in Tamil is an offensive, insult word used for aggression. It is pronounced like the English word 'day', with the last syllable 'y' extended. It can be used among intimates of same age as an endearment term with no offense, but never used against elders.] Like

the drunkards who shout in the streets, he screamed. As the audience had heard such a usage in Chennai streets, they appreciated and clapped instinctly. He stole that scene. Mr. M.R.R. then threw his hat. Clapping heard. He then threw his coat. Again, clapping heard. In between, Mr. K.N.R. had to follow up action. But that day, he was rather slow. How long Mr. M.R.R. can wait? Those who were watching that scene realized that Mr. M.R.R. had decided to act with tempo. Suddenly, Mr.M.R.R. had lifted up Mr. K.N.R. and threw him.

None expected this act. Even Mr. K.N.R. did not expect such a treatment. Even in talk, none could talk against him in that company. This being so, another actor lifting him and throwing became a self-respect issue for Mr. K.N.R. The respect other actors in the company had on him would suffer was his worry. Suppose if the audience noted that he had 'lost', his fame would be down-graded. What happened after that scene was of interest to many of us.

Mr. K.N.R. who got up immediately threw Mr. M.R.R. down. For all of us, it was evident that latter cooperated for this act. But, when Mr. M.R.R. got back in his feet and attempted to throw Mr. K.N.R., the latter failed to cooperate. For a while, both pitted their challenge. Then, Mr.M.R.R was in young rage. But, Mr. K.N.R. was older than his opponent. Both fell down simultaneously. Then, as the scene played out, Mr. M.R.R. allowed himself to be beaten by the spy as per story line. Even though, event happened unexpectedly, that the prevailing view that Mr. K.N.R. should not be insulted had been broken.

Mr. M.R.R. continued to act in the same Veeramuthu role in Pathi Bakthi drama. In between, both had discussed the routines of fighting steps mutually, and as such the next staging of Pathi Bakthi was a grand success and the climax scene elicited 'Once more' request from the audience.

In the drama cottages, they used to place firm, iron rings for tying ladder ropes. While acting naturally in the fight scenes, Mr. M.R.R. did stumble on these iron rings without care. He wouldn't even worry about

hurting himself. Because of such nonchalant attitude, he had elevated the listless Veeramuthu role to one which could attract the crowd. If Mr. M.R.R. do not act as Veeramuthu, that drama would be listless was the talk of the crowd.

Like this, even in the 'Bombay Mail' drama, he had elevated a small role into an appealing one. In that drama, the role of Munian (villain's handyman role) had been popularized by him to such an extent that it deserved equal respect.

Then, in the 'Nalla Thangaal' drama, there is a role called Alangaari. (This character insults her sister-in-law severely. Just because of this, the character received its tag name Mooli Alangaari. It had become a tradition to call any woman who do such nasty things at home by this tag name. Note by Sachi: This description within parenthesis is as in the original. The word 'Mooli' in Tamil can be interpreted as 'devil'.) Due to the deeds of this character, Nalla Thangaal is forced to lit fire in the kitchen using raw banana stems. In this drama, traditionally a well-known actor plays the role of palace servant. Mr. K.N. R. used to play this role. Unfortunately, he had to return to his village for some reasons. Therefore, Mr. M.R.R. played the role of servant. In the scene, where the raw banana stems burns, and Alangaari was stunned, Mr. M.R.R. appeared and quipped, "O' God, if this raw banana stem is burning, what a virtuous woman this lady has to be?" For this, Mr. Puniyam who played the role of Alangaari returned the volley adeptly, "Is it because of her? Not really. It's because I'm standing here?" Then, Mr. M.R.R. unexpectedly circled Alangaari with a taunt, 'Our lady is full of virtue, Our lady is full of virtue' and danced. This act elicited applause from the audience. Mr. Puniyam who played the Alangaari role couldn't stop his laugh, but quipped, 'What's this? What is this circling dance?'

Then, Mr. M.R.R. retorted: 'Don't get mad at me. Other folks call you Mooli Alangaari. There won't be any fire, any rain, any air when you are present. I'll go and plug their mouths. From our lady's mouth, we have fire, from our lady's forehead we have water like rain...Do you think, I'll say this? Not so. Like the guy who commanded rain to come

down, from today you've changed into a virtuous lady. I'll tell this now' and left the stage. Mr. Puniyam, in the stage, was dumbfounded! There was unstoppable laughter from the audience and the screen had to be closed instantly.

Like this, [Mr. M.R.R.] who acted effortlessly with originality left the Boys Company in a few months. Reason: the company's restrictions couldn't suit his independent spirit.

He may not know, how much his deeds helped me in my drama career at that stage. Subsequently, I was able to play the Veeramuthu role developed by him. Then, even Mr. K.N.R. insisted that I should play such roles. I remember one incident. When we were playing at Vellore, there was cholera scare. Even there were some cholera victims in the drama company. We had to stop the drama for 15 days. This is because, the gate collection was affected badly.



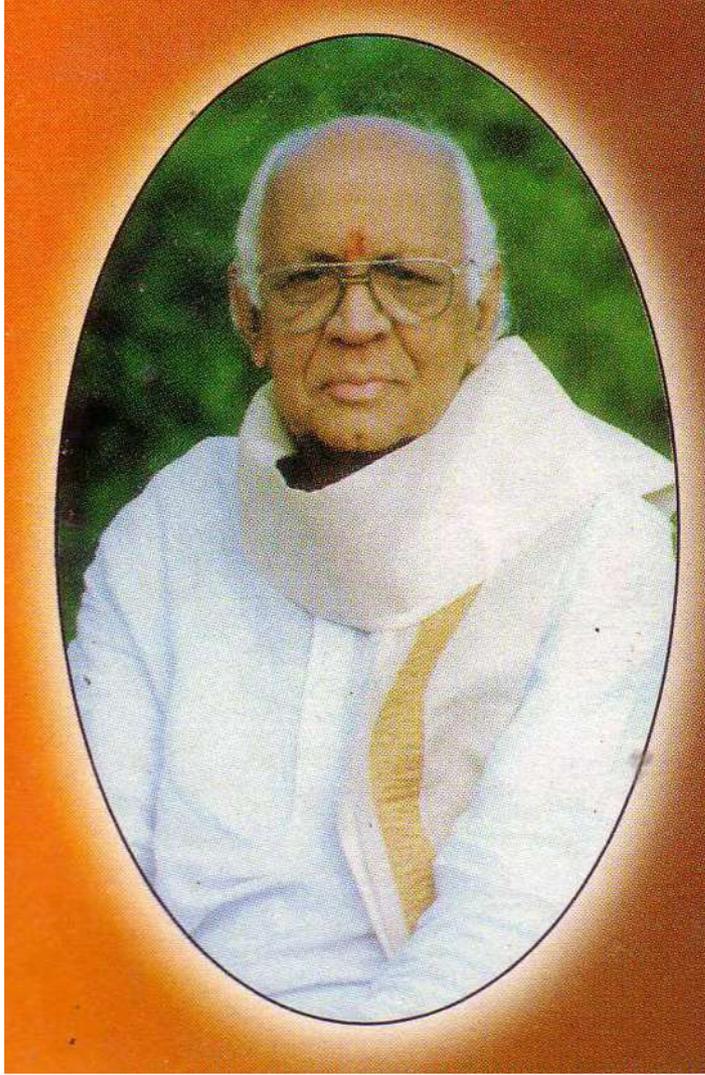
MGR with his ghost writer Vidwan V. Lakshmanan

The last day. I had suffered from diarrhea. The doctor who came to check the company guys, did check me and announced that I also had cholera. That was the last drama. Even if some scenes were not up to grade, I was told, 'Just do the fight scenes and rest. Then, you can go

home.’ Mr. K.N. R. told me, ‘No need for dialogue in other scenes. Just sleep in bed.’ On that day, I struggled to finish the fight scenes. At the end, I had fainted. I was carried home to be with my mother.”

Translation of the First paragraph: “One’s life will suffer in social context if it is not influenced by many. We face many events in our life if known folks, unknown folks, intimate folks, non-intimate folks influence us from varied angles, knowingly or indirectly.”

One may wonder why MGR introduced the 126th chapter like this when it appeared in 1972? It was focused mainly on the exploits of his drama mentor M.R. Radha. In early 1930s, Radha was MGR’s mentor. Then, in 1950s and first half of 1960s, he was also a fellow actor in his movies. Then, one day in 1967, he turned out to be a life-threatening aggressor. As I had mentioned at the beginning, MGR did willingly pay tribute to his mentor despite the latter’s rash deed. He could have easily omitted this homage. The cryptic wording ‘knowingly or indirectly’ also deserves a scrutiny. Was MGR commenting about M.R.Radha’s act of 1967 whether what he did to him was an act of his own will, or he was forced to do it by others who wanted to stop MGR’s rise in politics? A little more on this issue, later.



Vidwan V. Lakshmanan in 2002

In part 2 of this series, I had raised the question, whether MGR's autobiography 'Naan Yen Piranthaen' [Why I was Born?] was ghost-written? I had found evidence that it was so. It exists in K.Ravindar's 2009 book, which I introduced in part 3. K.Ravindar (original name Kaja Muhaideen) was an employee of MGR since 1953. Ravindar was employed as a writer in MGR's drama troupe and also in MGR Pictures movie-production company. In page 199 of his book, Ravindar had identified the ghost writer as Vidwan V. Lakshmanan, who himself was also an assistant and employee of MGR since 1954. This Lakshmanan also had authored a short biography on MGR in 1985

I continue with MGR's thoughts about his mother in chapter 127 of his autobiography. I have included some segments of this chapter in Part 3 of this series. The remaining segments are translated below. Having lost his father before he reached three years, for MGR, his mother played the dual role as father-cum-mother until she died in 1952. MGR reminisces those young days as follows:



MGR mother Sathyabama

“She used to call me occasionally, when others criticized him: ‘He washed my womb; don’t criticize him’. This means, I was the last child for her. Therefore, don’t say nasty things about him. She had never received this sort of love from me.

But, I have never wavered in believing my mother as the God. However, we did have occasional conflicts. My elder brother (Chakrapani) would never interfere in this conflict. But, when the conflict reaches a high point, he do intercede between us to bring out a resolution. To those in the house, he’d quip, ‘Don’t fool yourself by thinking that these two are always in conflict. But suddenly, they will join together, and we are the ones who’ll be isolated.’ To this, my mother would retort in defending myself. ‘Why not? We are no generational enemies, to continue as enemies. [He is] of young blood. Whatever it is, he is my son. Like me, he also has his dignity, speed and thoughts.’

For this, my brother won’t worry about anything. His want was to bring an end to our conflict. Having achieved this, he’d be glad, and he’d leave the scene silently. To this movement, my mother would retort again: ‘Hey! Big guy’ I know everything. You think that you had fooled us, by asserting something. Do you know, it’s we who had stopped the conflict.’ Then, she would request her daughter in law (Chakrapani’s wife) ‘Will you call him (i.e, me). In anger, he’d not eat?’ and at the sametime, she’d come out and stop me from leaving home, and feed me. This was our mother. Not only our mother; all mothers have the same passion to their kids like this.

After M.R. Radha elder left the company, I picked up his role as ‘Veeramuthu’. And, [after I displayed my talents], the situation arose to an extent that if I don’t feature in that role, the climax fight scene wouldn’t get audience appreciation. It’s because of this, even when I was suffering from cholera, I was asked to fight in that climax scene first, and then to take rest.

On another day, I was acting in ‘Pathi Bakthi’ drama and had to act in a fighting scene with Mr. Kali N. Ratnam. I had to fight, to give

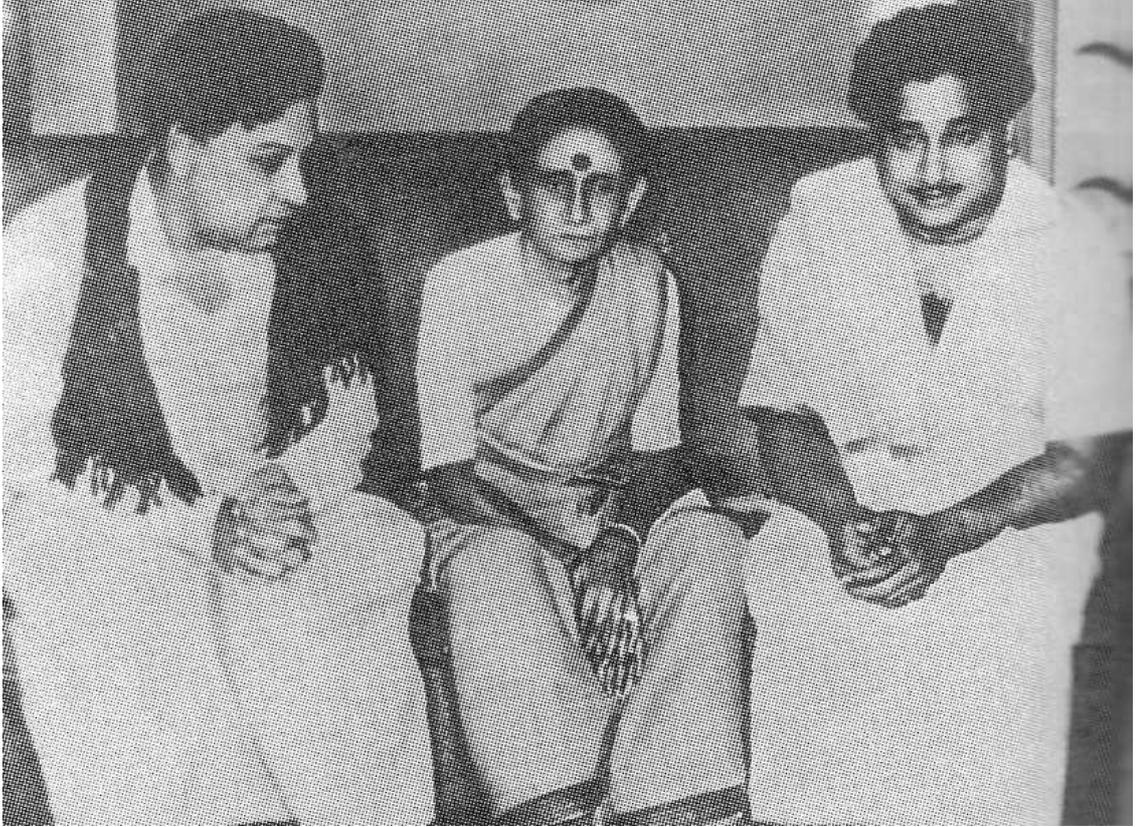
popularity to him. (This is how, some provide their 'spin' these days!). On that day, in the scene, Mr. Kali N. Ratnam had to raise me and throw. But, my attack was speedier on that day than usual. I'd press my two hands on his shoulders and raise my body. He'd hold my waist and within one or two seconds had to push me behind. For the audience, it would appear that he was effortlessly throwing me and the audience would applaud his action. On that day, he had some dull reflexes in responding to my speedier stunt. Rather than he throwing me, after holding my waist, he merely pushed me. I fell flat with my face down. However with sudden reflex, I prevented damage to my teeth and nose, by landing on two hands. Especially, the right hand was seriously hurt. I didn't feel it immediately, as we had to adjust for the next scene.

Immediately when I tried to raise by my right hand, I felt it had no 'weight' and I fell down. By using the left hand, I was able to get up. My right hand had swollen and I was in pain. Near the wrist, underneath the thumb, pain was intolerable. When I returned home, mother provided first aid, using folk remedy. For four or five days, I suffered from pain and I couldn't even brush my teeth. So, I had to depend on my mother for cleaning my mouth and feeding.

When I stood up, mother couldn't reach my mouth! How long, I had to bend? So, she uses her derisive pet name for me, 'Hey Mudihala! (emphying demon) Why you are killing me, after growing up? Then, she'd feed me with nutritious items with her own hands. In those days, medical treatments for such broken-bone accidents were hardly available. Even if they were available, it was beyond our reach. Somehow, I had to recover from such injury quickly. By the next Saturday or Sunday, I had to be ready for the same role in Pathi Bakthi drama. I cannot reject it. I was scared, if I did so, the company owner would replace me with someone else. For that one week period, I was blessed by the feeding of my mother from her own hand. That unusual gift soothed my pain tremendously. Even when I think about it now, I feel like being pumped with new energy.

When I mention this, don't think that I'm exaggerating unnecessarily. If you feel like that, just taste for yourself being fed by your mother. Nothing can best the taste and the mind relief you get. Any child who grows with mother's love, would never take the external burdens seriously.

I'm pleased to assert that I was blessed with such motherly love and greetings and these were the strengths that guide me."



MGR with Sivaji Ganesan and his mother Rajamani

This was what MGR recorded in 1972. Nine years later, when he successively held the Fifth International Tamil Research Conference/Seminar in Madurai, the same message did appear in a souvenir released on that occasion, in an interview with Copper Cochin. The interviewer wrote,

"He (MGR) was deeply influenced by his late mother who was his philosopher and guide in everything. He told me, 'My mother said,

whenever you devote time to any work you should devote your entire time and immerse yourself completely in that work. She also taught me two things. 'If you are a fatalist, then leave things to fate as it is not in your hands. If, on the other hand, you want to do things by your own efforts, then you must do so to the best of your conscience and ability. After your day's work is done take rest and when you go to bed do not worry about that day's events. When you wake up next day you can resume work refreshed. Do not postpone things, one does not know when death will come'. He paused for a moment and said reflectively, 'What I have done, what I will do in the future, is as a result of my mother's teachings. I am following her precepts'."

Reminiscences of entry into the movies

To the interviewer Copper Cochin, MGR had reminisced that he entered the Madurai Original Boys Company (Proprietor Mr. S.M. Sachidanandam Pillai) when he was seven (around 1924) and his elder brother was 15. "We did not do it in order to become actors. We did it for the food and the money and to relieve my mother from the burden of providing food for us. Do you know we were given food, clothing and 25 paise a week pocket money, which we did not need at all." In the pre-Independent India, if one paise was equivalent to 1/64 rupee, the monthly payment received by MGR in 1920s amounted approximately to 1.5 rupees.

Then, MGR mentioned the reason why they moved to movies in mid 1930s. "Because, the cinema paid much more. I got my first break in films in the end of 1934 and beginning of 1935 and it was then that I saw my first ever 100 rupee note which was given by Marudachalam Chettiar of Coimbatore, one of the proprietors of the Company, but right after this film I was out of work!"

For the remaining 111 movies, MGR was the major voice in decision making for his movies; beginning from the movie title, to the selection of heroines, supporting cast, director, lyricist, script writer, playback singers and release date – all depended on his whims and fancies. By any yard stick, ‘mother’ is a wholesome word promoting goodness and worthy traits, which instill self-sacrifice and boundless love. And for MGR, having it in his movie title was like a talisman which may counterbalance the mishandling or distributional pitfalls faced by competitive market.

Among these 111 movies, one can count nine movies with the Tamil word Thai (mother) as a prefix or suffix as titles. These are,

Thaikupin Tharam (Wife after Mother, 1956)

Thai Magalukku kattiya Thali (The holy thread tied by Mother to daughter, 1959)

Thai Sollai Thattathe (Don’t reject mother’s words, 1961)

Thayai Kaatha Thanayan (The son who saved the Mother, 1962)

Theiva Thai (Goddess Mother, 1964)

Thayin Madiyil (In the lap of Mother, 1964)

Kanni Thai (Virgin Mother, 1965)

Thaiku Thalaimagan (Eldest son of Mother, 1967)

Oru Thai Makkal (One Mother’s children, 1971)

Thus, 9 among the 111 MGR movie titles offers wholesome imagery on mothers’ deeds. Is there anything significant on this? By choice, MGR promoted love for mothers. Not only in movie titles, in numerous songs which he chose to lip synch, he instructed lyricists to praise the worth of mothers. For comparison, let me compare the movie titles of MGR’s rival for the same artistic and political niche audience, V.C. Ganesan (aka Sivaji Ganesan, 1928-2001). Sivaji Ganesan, in his movie

illustrious career between 1952 and 1999, starred in a total of 283 Tamil movies. Among these, 7 were in honorary (guest) roles without any payment. Only 5 Sivaji Ganesan movies had 'mother' in their title, including two in which he played honorary roles. These five were as follows:

Annaiyin Aanai (The command of Mother, 1958)

Annai Illam (House of Mother, 1963)

Thaai ku oru Thaalaatu (A lullaby for Mother, 1986)

Thaayai pola pillai noolai pola selai (A child like its Mother, a saree like its thread, 1959)

Thayee Unakkaha (All for you Mother, 1966).

பத்து ஆண்டுக்கு முன் அவள் இறந்ததாக அந்த ஆவி எனக்குப் பதில் சொல்விறா.

எனக்கும் தங்கமணிக்கும் இருமண மாதி ஏறத்தாழ இரண்டு ஆண்டுகளே ஆகியிருந்தன. அப்படியிருக்க என்னுடன் பேசிக் கொண்டிருக்கும் ஆவி, நான் இறந்து பத்து ஆண்டுகள் ஆகியிருக்கிறது என்று சொல்லுகிறதே — அப்படியானால் பத்தாண்டுகளுக்கு முன்பே செத்துப் போய்விட்ட தங்கமணியின் ஆவியையா நான் கல்யாணம் செய்து கொண்டேன்! ஒரு ஆவியோடா கணவனாக வாழ்ந்தேன்! இது எனது குறும்புத்தனத்தினால் என்று எனக்கு தானே கேட்டுக்கொண்ட கேள்வியாகும்.

பேரி முடிந்த பின் வெளியே வந்த பின் நிறு, வெங்கடசாமி அவர்களிடம் நான் என் கருத்தைச் சிரித்தவாறு சொன்னபோது அவர் எனக்குத் தந்த பட்டம்தான்—அந்த குறும்புத்தனம் கொண்ட பருவம் என்று பட்டமாகும்.

நான் விடவில்லை அந்த ஆவியை. மீண்டும் கேட்டேன், சொந்த உயர் எது? சரியான பதில் கிடைத்தது.

நாய் தந்தையரின் பெயர்கள் என்ன? மிகச் சரியான பதிலே கிடைத்தது...இவை யெல்லாம் சரியாகவே இருக்கின்றனவே; நான் சிறுமணம் செய்துகொண்ட தங்கமணிக்கு மூத்த வளாக இன்னொரு தங்கமணி இருந்து அவள் செத்துப் போயிருப்பாளா? அப்ப

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படியானால் ஒரு தமக்கை இருந்திருக்க வேண்டும். ஆனால், எனது வாழ்க்கைத் துணையானவரும் எங்கள் தாயாரால் தங்கமணி என்று பெயர் சூட்டப்பட்டவளுமான் அவள்தான் அவளது தாய்க்கு மூத்த குழந்தை; மூத்த குழந்தை; மூத்த பெண் குழந்தை.

இது எனக்கு நிச்சயமாகத் தெரியும். இந்த சந்தேகத்தை நீர்த்துக் கொள்ள இன்னொரு ஆவியைத் தேடிப் போக வேண்டிய கட்டாயமோ, தேவையோ எனக்கு அவசியமில்லா இருந்தது.

நான் ஏன் பிறந்தேன்?

ஆவியை (இதைத்தான் பேய் என்று சொல்லுகிறார்களோ, என்னவோ எனக்குத் தெரியாது. எனது அகராதிப்படி நான் இதைப்பேசுவே கருதுகிறேன்)க் கண்டு உண்மையில் நான் பயத்திருக்க வேண்டும். ஆனால் என்னோடு பேச விரும்பிய தங்கமணியின் ஆவி என்று சொல்லப்பட்ட அது என்னைக் கண்டு பயத்து ஓடி விட்டது, எனது அடுத்த கேள்வியைக் கேட்கத் தொடங்கியதும். நான் அவளுடைய ஆவியைத் துரத்திக்கொண்டு பின்னாலே ஓடினேன்... இல்லை... இல்லை. அந்த ஆவிப் புரோகிதரைத் தங்கமணியின் ஆவியைத் தொடர்ந்து ஓடச் செய்தேன். ஆனால் பாவம், இந்த மரணம் அந்த ஆவியைத் தொடர்ந்து ஓட முடியவில்லையோ என்னவோ, சோர்வுடன் பதில் தந்தார், "அது மறைந்து விட்டது" என்று!

நான் கண் கலங்கியவாறு சொன்னேன்....

இன்று அந்த ஆவியிடம் பேச முடியாமலான விஷயம் பற்றி ஒன்றிரண்டுபதில்களையாவது பெற்றுத்தான் திரும்புவேன்; இல்லையானால் நானே காலையில் நானும் ஆவியாக மாறி விடுவேன் என்று மிகமிக அழுத்தத்தோடும் அழுகையோடும் சொன்னேன். அவர் என்ன செய்வார்! அவருடைய

நம்பிக்கையில் பலவிதங்கள்!

குருவின் ஆவியை மீண்டும் காக்காள் பிடித்தார்—அந்தக் குரு ஆவியின் மனம் இரங்கியது...வந்தார். தேடினார்; ஓடினார்; விடவில்லை. தங்கமணி ஆவியின் குடுமியைப் பிடித்து இழுத்துக் கொண்டு வந்து நிறுத்தினார்.

குரு ஆவி வரும்போது மேசை ஒவ்வொரு முறையும் பலமாக அசையும். வேறு ஆண்கள் வரும்போது கொஞ்சம் மெல்லவே அசையும்....

குருவின் ஆவியுடைய மனம் இரங்கிற்று என்றேனே...ஆவிக்கு மனம் என்று ஒன்று இருந்திருக்க இயலுமா?



வழக்கு ஜானகிக்குச் சாதகமாக நியாயத் தீர்ப்புக் கிடைக்குமா?"

"வெற்றி ஜானகிக்கே... இழந்த பணம் நிச்சயம் திரும்பக் கிடைத்து விடும்!"—இது அந்த ஆவியின் பதில்.

(வழக்கில் ஜானகிக்குப் பெருந்த தோல்வியே பணவிகாரத்தில் ஏற்பட்ட தென்பதுதான் எல்லோருக்கும் தெரியுமே!)

தங்கமணியின் மரணம் அகால மரணமா? இயற்கையாக ஏற்பட்டதா?

"நினைவில்லை."—இப்படி ஒரு நல்ல பதில் கிடைத்தது....

கடைசியாக நான் கேட்ட கேள்வி:

"உன்னைச் சந்திக்க வரும்போது உனக்குப் பிடித்த மான ஒரு பொருளை வாங்கி வரச் சொல்லுயே, என்ன அது?"

நான் எவ்வளவு அவசரமாகக் கேட்டேனோ அதற்கு நேர்மாறாகத் தாமதமாகியது அவளுடைய ஆவியின் பதில் கிடைக்க....

சலிப்போடு சொன்னார் நண்பர்: "என்னமோ தெரியலே! இன்னக்கு ஒன்னுமே சரியா வரமாட்டேங்குது" என்று....

"மனித சக்திக்கும் மீறிய சக்தி படைத்த ஆவிக்குக் கூடக் குழப்பம் ஏற்பட்டு விடுமோ? ஒருவேளை அதனால் தான் இப்படி உங்களுக்கும் குழப்பு கிறதோ?" என்று கேட்டேன்.

உள்ளூற எனக்கு ஆத்திரமும் ஏமாற்றமும் ஏற்பட்டிருந்தன.

அவர் சொன்னார்: "அசுடு வழிய... "நாம் எப்படி துட்பு பண்ண முடியும்? கடவுள் பிராப்தம்... அப்படி...."

எனக்கிருந்த ஆத்திரத்தினால் நான் விடாமல் தொடர்ந்தேன். ஒரு

எம்.ஜி.ஆர்

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In the last two movies listed, Sivaji Ganesan appeared in honorary roles. From these statistics, one can infer that either promoting the mother-figure was a talisman for MGR's political success, or Sivaji Ganesan was more keen on concentrating in acting rather than controlling the overall aspects of the movie in which he starred. It should not be taken that Sivaji Ganesan was less respectful to his birth mother or Tamil mothers in general.

Sivaji had reminisced in his autobiography about MGR's mother as follows: "From the time we were children MGR and I were good

friends. We visited each other's homes often and were fed by each other's mothers. I will relate the story of our friendship.

Just after the end of the Second World War in 1943-44 (sic) I was residing next to the central railway station in Chennai. This was the period when we staged plays like Lakshmikanthan. MGR's mother and elder brother M.G. Chakrapani were my neighbours. MGR had just begun acting in films. My friend Kaaka Radhakrishnan and I would go to their house frequently and would usually linger there during meal times. Even if MGR said that he was hungry and wanted to eat his mother would ask him to wait for me. Such was her love for me."

One of MGR's critical biographers, M.S.S. Pandian noted, "Several of the MGR films give primacy to the role of the mother and it is reflected in the names of films like...". Pandian counted only 5 of the above-mentioned MGR movies, and missed 4 which I have included. To quote Pandian again, "Significantly, MGR, during public meetings, addressed his female audience as 'Thai kulam' or 'the community of mothers'. And it was also well propagated that MGR, in his real life, had shown enormous devotion to his mother Sathyabama. This included worshipping her picture every morning.."

Nevertheless, even a couple of MGR movies which had 'mother' in its title failed to generate revenue for his producers. A notable example is, Thai Magalukku kattiya Thali (1959), scripted by none other than C.N. Annadurai (Anna), a pioneer in this department.

I located one 1975 study by Ralph Dengler, on the language of Hollywood film titles. He had selected at random 7,590 American movies produced between 1900 and 1968 and analyzed the wording of their main titles. His inference was that, "over 70 years a shift in style from the public and good to the personal and perverse" had occurred. The same trend could be noted in the Tamil movie titles as well, especially in the movies of successors who picked up MGR's mantle as an action star (like Rajini Kanth, born 1950, who received the MGR award in 1989 from the Tamil Nadu government).



MGR with his second wife Sadhanandavathi

MGR allowed his mother to choose the first two brides for him in succession. The first was named Bhargavi, whom MGR married in 1938, while he was still struggling as an actor in Madras, playing bit part in his fourth movie Veera Jagathis. Bhargavi, who resembled Sathyabama's (MGR's mother) eldest daughter, was called by her daughter's name Thangamani. As such, she later came to be called Thangamani. Bhargavi died around 1940 suddenly while visiting her parent's house in Kerala. Then, to relieve the depressed mood of her son, Sathyabama arranged for a second marriage, which was agreed upon by MGR half-heartedly. Details on MGR's life with his first wife are scanty. But, he had recorded his thoughts on Thangamani, in two chapters (chapters 128 and 129) of his autobiography relating to his

experience on psychic medium exchange (clairvoyance). I provide cumulative excerpts from both these chapters, in translation below.

“When I was living at Coimbatore, I looked for a source with whom I could talk with the spirit of deceased wife Thangamani. This was suggested to me by the recently deceased Mr. Venkatasami and his wife (actress) U.R. Jeevaratnam. Before I had to meet that friend, I had to pay a nominal sum to become a member. Considering my income at that time, that sum was somewhat above my payment ability. However, I paid and became a member. After a few days, I was offered an opportunity to visit that location. Mr. Venkatasami was a good manager and he was responsible for the success of Jupiter Pictures under difficult periods.....

I remember that the house I was taken was located in the Gandhi Nagar section of Coimbatore. We were asked to come at 7 pm....I was asked to sit in front of a drawing of a guy dressed in western suit. There was a round table with three armless chairs. To my right, that friend was seated, and to my left Mr. Venkatasami sat. That friend asked me, “To whose spirit you wish to talk? I answered: ‘with my wife Thangamani’. Question: about what you like to ask? Answer: Excuse me! First, let the spirit appear. I’ll then mention....After the spirit appeared, I fired my questions.

What is the real name of Thangamani? Name given by her parents? He talked in English. Then suddenly, his facial expressions switched. He said, ‘Mr. Ramachandran! Instead of your wife, the spirit of a man had appeared. Therefore I’ve requested the spirit of your wife Thangamani to appear. Within few seconds, he claimed that my wife’s spirit had appeared. With joy, I asked, ‘Are you my Thangamani?’ Then, he wrote in paper names such as Kalyani, Kumari, Chandra, Shyamala etc. The response was the spirit was changing the names frequently. At last, I got tired. I quipped, ‘Maybe she had forgotten’.

My next question was: ‘In which year she died, at what time and where? Reason of death? From the response I felt like fainting. The spirit replied that she had died ten years before. Only two years had passed

after I married Thangamani. This being the case, the spirit talking with me was telling that she had died ten years ago. If this was right, did I marry the spirit of Thangamani? Did I live as a husband with the spirit? These were the questions I asked then in jest... Then I continued talking. 'What was the native village?' Correct answer given. The names of mother and father; the answer was correct. Could it be there was another elder sister for Thangamani, who had died? If this is so, there should have been an elder sister. But, (my wife) named Thangamani by my mother was the eldest child for her mother. First child; First girl. This I know for sure. To decide on this, I felt that one need not go in search for another spirit.

I should have been frightened by the spirit (I don't know whether they call this spirit as the demon. In my dictionary, I equate it to demon). But, the spirit which was called as Thangamani's spirit became frightened and escaped. When I fired the next question, I had to run after that spirit. No..No.. I made that spirit facilitator to run after Thangamani's spirit. Too bad, that guy couldn't follow the spirit and replied lamely, 'It had disappeared'. With tears in my eyes, I told – I wanted to talk with that spirit and receive (correct) answers for one or two items before I return. If not, tomorrow morning I have to turn into a spirit. I said this firmly with tears in my eyes.... My friend was in a hurry. He said, 'Your wife's spirit will not wait for long. Before that, quickly ask two or more questions.' I asked the questions, I had ready.

'Will the verdict be in favor of Janaki in her case?'

The spirit answered: 'Janaki will win...The lost money will be recovered.' (All know later that Janaki lost her case in financial terms.)

'Was the death of Thangamani, ill-timed or was it natural?'

'I cannot remember' was the good answer.

My last question. 'When I come to meet you, you asked me to bring your favorite item. What was it?'

Though I was in haste, the answer from her spirit was delayed..

My friend quipped with a tired feeling: ‘I don’t know. I’m not getting everything correct today.’

Within myself, I was filled with anger, and felt cheated....”

I provide these excerpts from MGR’s reminiscences to focus on a few facts. First, in 1930s and 1940s, contacting the dead spouse’s spirit via a psychic medium should have been a prevailing fad in Tamil Nadu. I guess that this practice was especially so for young men who had lost their spouses within few years of their marriage. Renowned author R.K. Narayan (who lost his young wife Rajam for typhoid, after 5 years of marriage) also had described a similar medium exchange experience with the spirit of his deceased wife during 1939-1940. Secondly, MGR mentions passingly that his life with Thangamani lasted for approximately two years. Thirdly, MGR also cryptically mentions about a legal case in which Janaki (his third wife) was involved. Assuming that MGR came to be acquainted with Janaki only during late 1940s (after he played his first hero role in 1947) and there was no other Janaki in his life, internal time clues indicate that this ‘spirit medium’ exchange might have taken place probably in late 1940s.

MGR’s second wife’s name was Sadhanandhavathi, daughter of one Kadunga Nayar from Kuzhal Mannam village in Palakkadu district. This marriage probably took place in 1942, while MGR was still struggling for good prospects in the Tamil movie world. Subsequently, while Sadhanandhavathi contacted tuberculosis in late 1940s, MGR’s career picked up in 1950 with the movie Maruthanattu Ilavarasi (The princess of Marutha Land, 1950). The heroine of this movie was Vaikom Narayani Janaki (1923-1996) and she became MGR’s romantic interest, though she was married to another journeyman actor Ganapathy Bhat.

After his mother’s death in 1952, using discretion, MGR maintained two separate houses – one for his legally wedded wife Sadhanandhavathi, and the other one for his romantic interest V.N. Janaki, who had

separated herself from her husband Ganapathy Bhat. After the death of his second wife Sadhanandhavathi in 1962 during the general election period, he registered his marriage to Janaki.

Analytical biographer Pandian faults MGR on his personal life as “quite contradictory to the monogamous familial norms which he time and again preached on the screen. In fact, his real life would, within the cultural codes of Tamil society, meet all the requirements of a notorious home-breaker. First of all, he married thrice and was living with his third wife, V.N. Janaki, while his second wife was still alive. Secondly, he married his third wife while her earlier husband was still alive.”

I'd say that Pandian, trained in his Marxist school, seems too harsh on MGR; though his logic is convincing, is rather unreasonable in practice. MGR might be critiqued as a hypocrite or a cheat to a degree in preaching monogamous family norms in his movies while practicing another pattern at home. Then, how could Pandian defend the lives of great Karl Marx (1818-1883), who earned money from a capitalist tycoon by writing to New York Daily Tribune(between 1852 and 1861) while preaching communism or that of other Communist leaders like Trotsky and Mao Zedong who set themselves different from the struggling masses by accumulating power, and conjugal pleasure? Not only Hollywood, even within the Tamil movie world in Madras, bigamy and multiple marriages among actors, producers, directors and lyricists have been institutionalized as the prevalent norm, as long as the suffering spouse don't make a complaint to police on the offending partner. Among MGR's cinema contemporaries, Sivaji Ganesan, to his credit, remained an exception to this norm. To mention some prominent names, MGR's fellow DMK party-affiliated contemporaries (N.S. Krishnan, M. Karunanidhi, S.S. Rajendran, poet Kannadasan) and other actors (M.R. Radha, Gemini Ganesan, A.V.M. Rajan, K.A.Thangavelu and Kamal Hassan) were bigamists or trigamists.

As of now, the completed six parts in this series amounts to over 18,000 words. It is my view that MGR's pre-hero phase during the first 30 years of his life has not been covered in such detail, for lack of attention and

want of materials by his biographers. I acknowledge the help of my friends and fans (N. Ramarathnam, A. Vijayaraghavan, A.M. Pandian, S. Sivakumaran and Yoshitaka Terada) who had gifted me complimentary copies of books and reprints of articles on Tamil movies and music which cover the pre-1950 period. Their kindness as well as my assembled collections over decades had helped and stimulated me in scribing this MGR story.

Initially, I planned to stop this series after five parts. But encouragement via emails received from few lifted my spirit to continue this series. Next month, I'll reach 60, and I have been an avid fan of MGR for 50 years since I watched one of his Thai (mother)-movies *Thai Sollai Thattathe* (Don't Reject Mother's Words) in 1962 at the now demolished Plaza theatre in Colombo. In the second half of 1960s, when I was a student at the Colombo Hindu College, Ratmalana, I vividly remember participating in the cinema-politics discussion about Tamil Nadu daily with one of my classmates of Indian Chettiar origin. His name is Veerappan. Our diminutive for him was 'Veera'. His father's name is Sivalingam Chettiar. From 1964 to 1968, we used to have debates on what MGR or Annadurai did was correct or not in between class hours. He was a pro-Congress (leader Kamraj) supporter. In between class hours, we used to duel verbally on the DMK-Congress conflicts in Tamil Nadu. One thing which I liked in my interactions with Veera was that he was privy to informal (or 'off the record' in journalism parlance) 'Chettiar network news', and he would routinely deliver us many Tamil Nadu stories which we hardly received from daily newspapers or radio or even in books.

Why do I reminisce about Veera here? I remember him mentioning that his father was also involved in financing or producing a Tamil movie (with actress Padmini as one of the lead players) and something drastic happened, and lost all the capital. Then, some of his relatives or friends lent him little money for passage to Ceylon, to establish himself in a new field of business. That's how, his family landed in Colombo. His father became a successful businessman in 1950s, and by late 1960s he

returned to Tamil Nadu with his family. As MGR had mentioned the role of Nagarattar or Chettiar (mercantile bankers) community as the patron of dramas in his autobiography (part 4), we also note from the reminiscences of Ellis Dungan (presented below), that they were also the life-line and patrons for the budding Tamil movie industry in 1930s.

Though there have been numerous short adulatory biographies of MGR in Tamil (about which M.S.S. Pandian had critically commented in his book – see below), I'm of the opinion that his story deserves a good treatment in English. In this respect, he has been poorly served. I wanted to rectify this lacuna and continue this remembrance series. Previously, I have written short commentaries and review of books about MGR in English and six are accessible in the internet.

- (1) Role models for heroism among Tamils*
- (2) MGR: The Man from Maruthur & Malainadu*
- (3) MGR, the man and the myth (K. Mohandas) – book review.*
- (4) On Milton Friedman, MGR and Annaism (2006)*
- (5) The 'Birth-soil bond' of MGR; an 89th birth anniversary note (2006)*
- (6) Kannadasan's minor book(let) on MGR: Random notes (2011)*

I assembled this list to claim my authority as the writer of these items. In the internet platform, in a number of MGR fans' websites and blogs, I notice with a tinge of sadness that my name had been clipped off in re-posting the originals. This type of vandalism and plagiarism deserves criticism and it is my wish that the culture of requesting prior permission from the authors for posting deserves recognition. I was also amused that my item titled 'On Milton Friedman, MGR & Annaism', had been cited in a Wikipedia entry on Socialismo (in Spanish), as reference 37, devoid of author's name, though the original version as it appeared in the sangam site carried the contributor's name!

MGR biographies in English

To my knowledge, there have appeared four MGR biographies in English. These are,

Attar Chand: M.G. Ramachandran –My Blood Brother (1988)

K. Mohandas: MGR: The Man and the Myth (1992)

M.S.S. Pandian: The Image Trap – M G Ramachandran in Film and Politics (1992)

Roopa Swaminathan: M G Ramachandran – Jewel of the Masses (2002)

The Hindu daily published a brief three paragraph review for Attar Chand’s biography. It was as follows:

“This is the story of a charismatic leader who ruled the hearts of millions of men, women and children of Tamil Nadu who felt orphaned when he died in December 1987. The filmstar-turned politician, MGR, guided the destiny of the State for almost a decade when he implemented a number of anti-poverty programmes, particularly to benefit the weaker sections, women and children.

In this biography, the author has brought out vividly not only MGR’s journey from rags to riches but also his achievements as the unquestioned leader of the AIADMK party and Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The book ends with the widow of MGR, Janaki Ramachandran’s induction as Chief Minister who, however, stayed in office hardly for a month.

For his work, Attar Chand has made liberal use of the material published in different newspapers. While one cannot belittle the performance of the AIADMK Government, not everybody will agree with some of the observations of the author, especially with regard to success in eradicating corruption and reaching outstanding levels in the industrial and economic fronts.”

The reference to AIADMK in the review relates to All India Anna DMK, the party founded by MGR in 1972, after he was evicted from the DMK

party, which he joined in 1953. To reinforce my point presented in the first paragraph, I provide a scan of material from Attar Chand's book. MGR's first 30 years were covered in only three paragraphs! The same was true in Pandian's book as well. Mohandas hardly touched this period. I provide my comparison on the little merits and big demerits of these biographies, and their effect on my long term interest in preparing an authentic work on MGR. A PDF table with 17 comparative criteria which I prepared is offered nearby. As I provide my grade for each of these four biographies, Attar Chand's biography of 1988, was a 'quickie', assembled immediately after MGR's death. 1992 saw two more biographies. While, Mohandas's work was a 'friendly' one, Pandian's essay was sloppy. Ten years later, Roopa Swaminathan brought forth a skinny book for younger readers, with most of the material borrowed from Pandian's book.



Ellis R. Dungan

Another book which is of interest was by Tamil movie chronicler Randor Guy (pen name) with the title, Starlight, Starbright – The Early Tamil Cinema(1997), which carries chapters on the production background MGR's first movie Sathi Leelavathi (1936) and its associated artistes

Ellis R. Dungan (the director) and movie mogul S.S. Vasan (the script writer). Randor Guy also contributed a short chapter on MGR in this book.

Impressions of Ellis Dungan

I provide below excerpts of Ellis Dungan (1909-2001), a Barton, Ohio-born American who landed in Madras in 1935, after studying cinematography at the University of Southern California, through the courtesy of his Indian pal Manik (Munnay) Lal Tandon. It was through Tandon's introduction, Dungan came to direct the Sathi Leelavathimovie.

“Our first impression of Madras was the friendliness of its people. We were simply overwhelmed with their kindness and hospitality and were besieged by local film journalists and news-hounds for interviews. It appeared that we were the first Americans with any Hollywood know-how and experience to touch down there. ..In 1935 when we first arrived there, Madras had a population of 750,000; it probably now has around 5 million residents.

Following the ‘blockbuster’ release of Nandanar, Tandon had an offer to direct a Tamil film titled Sathi Leelavathi (Sathi meaning self-immolation by Indian widows, and Leelavathi being the name of the leading female character in the movie). Tandon asked if I would like to direct the film as he had a previous offer to direct Shame of the Nation in the Hindi language (his native language) at a Calcutta studio. I said to him, ‘Sure, I would like to get my feet wet and go where the action is.’ Tandon replied, ‘I’ll be with you whenever I can.’

The Madras producers knew Tandon well, and he had a good reputation in Madras. But I was new and the producers were a little afraid of an unknown American coming over to direct Tamil films. However, they finally agreed and said, ‘Okay, if Tandon is with you, we will sign the contract.’ So we were off and running, but Tandon could not stay long in Madras... ”

Dungan's ethnological experience with caste-bound Tamil society in 1935 is worth repetition for its relevance. This also offers a tangential glimpse on how the social-liberation role played by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker and his lieutenant C.N. Annadurai (Anna) in 1930s worked in attracting the majority Tamils to their cause and how Anna became an influential script writer in late 1940s. Dungan had written,

“As an American, I was considered to be of the lowest caste, that is, a pariah or an outcast. Being considered an ‘untouchable’, I was unable to enter their temples to direct my pictures. (The Constitution of India has now legally abolished untouchability). When filming a temple scene, I would have to stand outside on top of a wall and shout directions to my English-speaking Indian assistants inside. My assistants would then relay my directions to the actors. However, that never worked out very well. One day while directing a scene for my first film, I dressed as a North Indian Brahmin from Kashmir. They are fairer-skinned, so by putting on an Indian dhoti and upper garment and smearing my face with dark Egyptian makeup, I was able to enter the inner sanctum to direct the scene. The following day the temple priest learned that I had been in the temple and ordered the floors and walls to be scrubbed down. Then another time an Indian Brahmin friend, a journalist, was forced to pay fifty dollars to have a temple cleansed because I sat on the floor of the temple to witness his daughter's wedding (at his invitation).”

I provide four paragraphs from Dungan's experience with Sathi Leelavathi production and its after-effect.

“With Sathi Leelavathi, my first film in India, I had much to learn. Some of the cameo incidents during its production left a lasting impression on me, such as when the Vel Pictures studio manager, Mr. Ramamurthi, used to clean all the exposed negatives by hand – inch by inch, frame by frame. It was unbelievable that he would go through fourteen or fifteen thousand feet of film in this manner. It seemingly took days to clean the exposed negative of a complete motion picture film. (Ramamurthi later became assistant manager at the Kodak film distribution offices in Madras.)

Subjected to abject poverty, neither MGR's elder brother Chakrapani nor he could afford education. He had to cut short his schooling at the tender age of seven while in the third standard.

Shortly thereafter, Ramachandran joined the Madurai Original Boys Drama Company owned by Kandaswamy Pillai. For another ten years he was with the theatre group which toured even faraway places like Burma.

Ramachandran made his debut in Tamil films in 1935 when he was given a minor role in "Sathi Leelavathi", scripted by S.S. Vasan of Gemini Films. For the next ten years he had to be contented with secondary roles as the Tamil screen was then dominated by veterans like M.K.Thiagraja Bhagavathar, P.U.Chinnappa and K.R.Ramaswamy. The real break came in 1945 when he was given a lead role in "Rajakumari", which marked his meteoric rise to stardom.

Three paragraphs cover the first 30 years

Late one night, Sircar, my film editor, and I were cutting the final version of Sathi Leelavathi. Our producer, A.N.M. Chellam Chettiar, was lying nearby on the editing room floor, sleeping and snoring loudly. It disturbed us so much that we playfully decided to cut off his big mustache while he slept. But at the last minute I got a little funky and said no; 'This may be my first, and last, picture in India if I cut off his mustache.' So we let him snore away....

The story of Sathi Leelavathi was based on a novel turned stage play, and the actors were actually a stage troupe. Later I jokingly told friends that when a stage troupe came to the cinema, they brought the 'stage' with them, and as a result, in the early days of filmmaking in India, the acting had a tendency to be very 'stagey'. As we know, the camera enlarges facial expressions and body features, and a film actor or actress has to tone them down a little and not exaggerate expressions as is done on the stage. Also some of the actors had never appeared in front

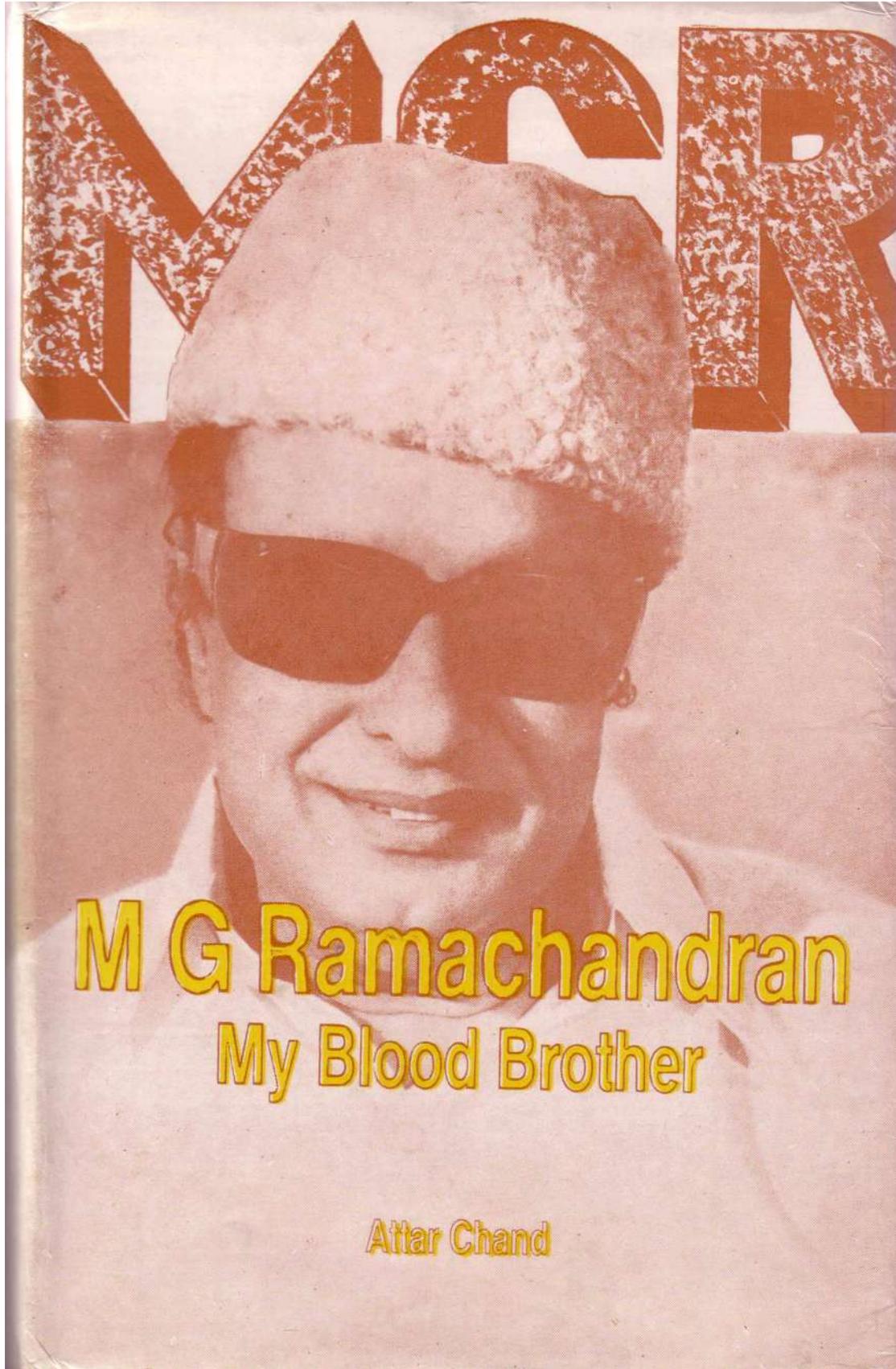
of a motion picture camera before and it frightened them, whereupon they would often 'freeze' and couldn't speak.

In spite of its all, Sathi Leelavathi proved to be quite a success at the box office. As a result, I was offered other pictures to direct. With this, my first film in India, I broke into the film business 'at the top', when most directors had to start at the bottom and work up..."

The cast and plot for *Sathi Leelavathi* movie

MGR appeared in his debut role as a sub inspector of police.

When Sathi Leelavathi movie was released on March 28, 1936, he was barely 19 years and 2 months old. Apart from MGR, it was also a debut movie for other actors who made a deep impact in Tamil movies for decades. The hero of the movie was Madras Kandasamy Mudaliar Radha (no relation to actor M.R. Radha, who had a tiff with MGR in 1967 and shot him), whose father Kandasamy Mudaliar was the chief sponsor of the movie. The villain role was played by Tirunelvely S. Baliah (renowned multi-talented character actor). Comedian Nagarkoil Sudalaimuthu Krishnan also debuted in this movie. Another debutant was Subramaniam Srinivasan aka S.S.Vasan as a story-originator, later to gain status as a movie mogul.



First MGR biography in English

According to Randor Guy, the movie plot was lifted and adopted to Tamil Nadu background from Danesbury House (1860), the first novel by an invalid British women author Mrs. Henry Wood aka Ellen Price (1820-1887), who suffered from scoliosis. As it was a temperance story, it fitted well with the anti-alcohol campaign by Indian freedom fighters. The plot in brief, as provided by Randor Guy: the hero (M.K. Radha) ill-treats his wife (Gnanambal, Radha's real life wife), after being influenced by alcohol and induced by villain (Baliah). On one occasion, he also fires a pistol at his friend and thinking that he had committed a murder escapes. Then, to evade from police hero flees to Ceylon to work in a tea estate and strike it rich after discovering hidden treasure. Hero then returns to India and live under a disguise to escape from police. Subsequently, he was caught, tried for murder and sentenced to death. At the appropriate climax, the police inspector (MGR) turns up with evidence that relieves the hero from murder charges and the villain being nailed. The hero re-united with his wife. Randor Guy informs that though Sathi Leelavathiearned its place in the history of Tamil cinema, "no print of this film is known to exist today."

Sathi Leelavathi's standing in comparison to other Tamil movies of 1936

The first Tamil movie (talkie) was released in 1931. In the succeeding years, the number of Tamil movies released increased as follows: 1932 – 4 movies, 1933 – 8 movies, 1934 – 14 movies, 1935 – 32 movies, and 1936 – 38 movies; MGR starred in bit-parts in two, of which Sathi Leelavathi was the first. For record, a total number of 217 movies were released in India in all languages (Hindi 134, Tamil 38, Bengali 19, Telugu 12, Marathi 6, Gujarathi 4, Kannada 1 and the rest in other languages) for the year 1936. For reference, I provide the names of 38 Tamil movies released in 1936 and the name of lead actor within parenthesis below. Onomastics of the movie titles reveal that majority were based on Hindu religious, epic and mythological names (such as Indra, Krishna, Arjuna, Kusela, Chandra, Nalayini, Parvathi, Bhisma,

Rukmini, Viswamithra, Abimanyu) and historical Hindu saints (Pattinattar, Meera, Kabir). Only a few like Iru Sahothararkal (Two Brothers), which was MGR's second movie for the year, was based on social theme.

Ali Padhusa (C.S.Selvaratnam)

Bhama Parinayam (Serukalatoor Saama)

Bhishmar (M.S.Thamothara Rao)

Chandrasahasana (V.N.Sundaram)

Chandrakantha (Kali N. Ratnam)

Chandramohana (M.K. Radha)

Dharmapathini (V.A.Sellappah)

Indra Sabha (T.K.Suntharappa)

Iru Sahothararkal (K.P. Kesavan)

Karuda Karvabangam (M.D. Parthasarathi)

Krishnanarathi (K.V. Vaithianatha Aiyar)

Krishna Arjuna (K.V. Seenivasa Bhagavathar)

Kuesela (Papanasam Sivan)

Madras Mail (Battling Mani)

Maha Bharatham [Srimath] (Annaji Rao)

Mahatma Kabirdas (P.D.V. Krishnan)

Manohara (P.G.Venkatesan)

Meerabhai (C.V.V. Panthulu)

Miss Kamala (C.M. Durai)

Naveena sarangadhara (M.K. Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar)

Nalayini (C.S. Selvaratnam)

Nalayini (K.V. Vaithianatha Aiyar)

Paduka Pattabhishekam (M.R. Krishnamoorthy)

Parvathi Kalyanam (P.S. Seenivasa Rao)

Pattinattar (M.M. Thandapani Desigar)

Pathi Bakthi (K.P. Kesavan)

Ratnavali (M.R. Krishnamoorthy)

Raja Desingu (T.K. Suntharappa)

Rukmani Kalyanam (Nadesa Aiyar)

Sathi Leelavathi (M.K. Radha)

Sathyaseelan (M.K. Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar)

Seemanthini (M.R. Krishnamoorthy)

Srimathi Parinayam (?? not indicated)

Tharasa saangam (G.S. Vijaya Rao)

Usha Kalyanam (C.V.V. Panthulu)

Vasanthasena (V.A. Sellappah)

Veera Abimanyu (M.R. Krishnamoorthy)

Viswamithra (M.K. Gopala Aiyangar)

Among the lead actors, only M.K. Thiyagaraja Bhagavathar and M.K. Radha were able to climb to the superstar grade in 1940s. Among the

rest, (1) some attained fame as musicians (M.D. Parthasarathi, MM. Thandapani Desigar), (2) one attained fame as a Tamil composer-lyricist (Papanasam Sivan), (3) one became a playback singer (V.N. Sundaram), and (4) few stood out later as actors in supportive roles (P.G.Venkatesan, Serukallatur Shaama and Kali N. Ratnam). But, majority faded out within a few years.

As Barnow and Krishnaswamy had observed in their pioneering work *Indian Film* (1963), in 1930s, “Although some performers were ‘stars’ in that they were widely known and featured in publicity, no real star system had as yet developed. The star was an employee; he or she was not the pivot of planning and was not in control. Producer and director were the dominant figures. Throughout the 1930s the difference between the salaries of top actors and other actors remained small by the standards of later years. Throughout this period Rs. 3,000 per month remained the ceiling for star salaries at several of the larger companies. An established lesser actor might get Rs. 600; a beginner, Rs.60.” Thus it could be assumed that MGR’s salary for his early movies were 60 rupees per week. Author Krishnaswamy’s father K. Subramaniam (1904-1971) was a Tamil movie pioneer involved in production and direction; as such the salaries paid for actors during 1930s can be relied with full confidence.

When checking these early Tamil movies, one finds that it was not unusual to have the **same names for movies, to appear in one year, produced by two different companies.** For example, 1933 had two ‘Pralhalatha’ movies produced by New Theaters and East India Film Company. 1934 had two ‘Draupadi Vasthrapakaranam’ movies produced by Angel Films and Seenivas Cinetone. 1935 had two ‘Nalla Thangal’ movies produced by Angel Films and Pioneer Films. So, there were two ‘Nalayini’ movies produced by Oriental Sound Pictures and Sundaram Talkies in 1936. As the plots of all these movies were based on Hindu religious themes (alternately called, puranic), no problems existed with copyright issues. Producers (mostly businessman – Chettiars) treated movies as another commodity, akin to food,

condiments and clothes, to sell to the public. Majority hardly cared for artistic or esthetic merit in movie making for the illiterate audience. As, such an audience had learned the basics of religious and epic stories via the prevalent traditional story telling art forms, the polish and 'hook' was not in the movie titles, but focused in the faces and voices of heroes and starlets as well as the humor component linked to the main plot. 1936 also saw the same plot based on a social theme, produced by two different companies, under different names. Sathi Leelavathi and Pathibakthibelonged to this category.

Pathibakthi movie, based on plot scripted by noted playwright T.P.Krishnasamy Pavalar, and produced by Madurai Original Boys Company (to which MGR belonged) had MGR's mentors of stage, K.P. Kesavan, Kali N. Ratnam and K.K.Perumal starring in it. MGR featured in a small role in the Sathi Leelavathi movie, along with M.K. Radha, whose father was the sponsor for this movie. According to Randor Guy, when it came to copyrights issue, the story-originator S.S.Vasan for Sathi Leelavathi movie proved in courts that both, he and the rival playwright T.P. Krishnasamy Pavalar had plagiarized the same plot of Mrs. Henry Wood's Danesbury House novel. As such, copyright infringement clime was invalid. According to Tamil film historian Aranthai Narayanan, Sathi Leelavathi turned out better than Pathi Bakthiin revenue. This was attributed to solid performances by M.K. Radha (hero), T.S.Baliah (villain) and N.S.Krishnan (comedian), as well as publicity adapted by S.S.Vasan and the support of Independence-era politicians for anti-alcohol movement.

Ellis Dungan had remembered MGR (after his death) as follows in autobiography: "He started his career as a film actor in my first film, Sathi Leelavathi as a raw recruit in the minor role of a police inspector and also acted in Meeraand Manthiri Kumari. I could see the improvement in his acting from picture to picture. MGR was a tall, handsome, and athletic-type man, admired by all, and became extremely popular with the movie goers. I am proud to say that I played a role in

helping his career along. He was a talented and versatile performer and, I understand, a beloved and popular chief minister.”

Between 1936 and 1950, Dungan directed 12 full length Tamil movies and MGR starred in five of them, which included Meera (1945; Carnatic diva M.S. Subbulakshmi’s incomparable hit movie) and Manthri Kumari (1950, one of his early hero-role movies, scripted by M. Karunanidhi). One of the humorous debating topics during our school days was, whether MGR was literate in English. Many of my colleagues used to ridicule that compared to Sivaji Ganesan’s polished English, MGR’s English was of poor quality. Though he had regular schooling only upto 3rd grade, now we can be certain that if MGR’s English skills were pitiable, he couldn’t have benefitted and elevated himself from a bit-player to hero under Dungan’s direction in 15 years.

In Love with Temperance theme

The Sathi Leelavathi (1936) movie, in which MGR debuted, had temperance in its plot. One thing which became certain was that MGR, for the whole 40 years of his movie career which spanned 133 movies, made the temperance theme as his center pillar of his movie image. He might have ignored other Gandhian values, but on this temperance theme as well as non-torture of women, he was unshakable. He detested having scripts in which his character had to imbibe alcohol. By sticking to his conviction, he narrowed the range of characters he could play. Many Tamil movie critics had ridiculed this wooden, two-dimensional nature of MGR’s movie characters which could never ever flout these two virtues of temperance and non-torture of women. His biographer Pandian calls it derisively as, “meticulously constructed image”. One may be tempted to ask, what is wrong in it? Is it a sin to preach temperance and non-torture of women in movies? Pandian also has observed, “he (MGR, that is) asked lyric writers to introduce changes in them to suit his image”.

But, MGR earned the merits and votes of women folk because of this adamancy. Occasionally, MGR did permit his movie character to use

alcohol in song sequences. Pandian's gripe can be answered easily. In MGR's conviction, songs should be of educational value, in addition to its entertaining function. In Indian culture (as well as other cultures), songs were an important vehicle for cultural education since ages. As such, alcohol use for his character was allowed either under the pretext of play-acting as a drunkard (in the 1963 Pana Thottam (Money Garden) movie, for the duet song 'Javvathu Medai Iddu' with the heroine) or as a conflict between the two components of Freudian structural model of psyche – ego (which acts according to the reality principle) and super ego or conscience (which aims for perfection). The latter example was featured in MGR's 100th movie Oli Villaku (Light Lamp), as a solo song 'Thairiyamaha Sol Nee Manithan Thaana?' (Would you tell courageously whether you are a human?). Five images of MGR appear in screen for this song.

Biographer Pandian's incomplete portrayal of MGR

Pandian had covered MGR's pre-hero years in Tamil movies (a period of 10 years, from 1936 to 1947) in merely three sentences, as follows:

“During his early film career, MGR was compelled by circumstances to play minor roles in several films, including mythological ones. He appeared as Vishnu in Dakshayagnam (1938), as Indiran in Prahalada (1939), as Parameswarar in Sri Murugan (1946) and as Indirajit in Seetha Jananam (1947). And he appeared, for the first time, as the hero in Jupiter Pictures' Rajakumari (1947), which was directed by A.S.A. Samy.”

Pandian's biography was reviewed by V. Jayanth in The Hindu daily. Here is the first half of this review.

“MGR the phenomenon provides enough material for any number of books and theories. The fact was that in his life and death, he defied all theories and created a niche for himself that will be difficult to erase or understand.

And this is precisely what the author, Pandian, a fellow of the Madras Institute of Development Studies, tries to explore in his book.

Unfortunately, it appears to be a biased picture, because he is trying to fit into his own trap, the events and policies of MGR the actor and politician.

There can be no escaping the fact that Tamil Nadu's political stage has been closely interlocked with the theatre and cinema here even since the Dravidian movement took deep political roots. The DMK made political capital out of the dialogue-writing skills of its leaders C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi and it was MGR who had to mouth them to capture the imagination of the youth of the 1960s.

Pandian has taken trouble, like a true researcher, to study so many publications and writings on MGR, but the pity is he has relied too much on some sources which do not carry the kind of weight or conviction to knowledgeable readers..."

I concur with the inference made by reviewer Jayanth in the last quoted paragraph. In my opinion, Pandian's laborious study suffers from lack of internal controls (such as Indian film plots acted by MGR's contemporaries – especially Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi) as well as lack of external controls (film plots from Hollywood, or even other languages such as Russian, Chinese or Japanese) in the same period MGR made his movies. I'll deal with this issue in a forthcoming part. In this part, I wish to add more on the pre-hero decade of MGR. This is because, the travails and rejections, combined with low pay, less opportunities and death of his young first wife he faced while establishing his career, made MGR a man of character.



‘இரு சகோதரர்கள்’ பட விளம்பரம்
(1936)

MGR's second movie which was also released in 1936 was Iru Sahodarargal (Two Brothers), again had a social plot. Tamil movie historian Aranthai Narayanan had provided the following background to this movie. Chakravarthi Rajagopalachariar (popularly known as Rajaji), a prominent pre-Independent Congress leader had an unfavorable opinion about cinema then. He thought it promotes decadence. The producer Coimbatore P. Ramasamy's goal was to prove that movies could be used to influence societal needs. He was keen to attract the attention of Rajaji and somehow managed to invite him for a

viewing. Only after listening the movie's story line, Rajaji consented to appear for a viewing, and he was highly impressed. The entire collection of that day was handed to Rajaji, for the 'Patel fund' then being collected by the freedom fighters. In this movie, MGR was in a minor role, again playing a policeman, the same as his debut movie Sathi Leelavathi. The hero of this movie was K.P. Kesavan, one of MGR's mentor in stage.

Ellis Dungan who directed the movie had reminisced the following in his 2001 autobiography. The promotional poster for this movie states in English, "Directed by Ellis R. Duncan of Hollywood".

"I was approached by Parmeswar Sound Pictures of Coimbatore to direct another social film titled Iru Sahodaragal (Two Brothers), to be produced at Saraj Movietone Studios in Bombay. As was the case with Sathi Leelavathi, the cast came from the stage. So again I had to take on the task of subduing the actors' voices and facial expressions. We completed 'Two Brothers' in about three months...

The writers who wrote the promotional pieces for my Indian films really had a way with words. One piece described the film, 'Two Brothers' as 'a powerful drama depicting the human emotions of love, hatred, jealousy, laughter, sorrow, anger and happiness...

While I was still in Bombay, having just wrapped up the film, my stepsister Margaret Kennedy arrived in India from the US. We traveled to Madras just in time to attend the premiere of 'Two Brothers', and I quote from Margaret from a 1937 Wheeling newspaper clipping, after her return to the US: 'All the Indian critics say that this is the best Tamil picture of the year. It is really very good considering the handicaps Ellis had to work under. The audiences are very interesting, with the women sitting on one side of the theater and the men on the other...'"

Poet Bharathidasan's satire on Tamil movies of 1930s

Though Dungan's stepsister had favorable words for the 'Two Brothers' movie, one Tamil poet poured scorn on the quality of the Tamil movies.

He was none other than the renowned atheist, Tamil nationalist poet Bharathidasan (1891-1964), whose collection of poems also appeared in 1936. Aranthai Narayanan had reproduced this biting satirical poem, with the title 'Cinema in Tamil Nadu' in his book. I provide the Tamil original in a scan. Though my English translation of this poem won't do justice for the beauty of the original, I provide it for its relevance to the theme covered here.

My Tamilians began to take movies;

They did it in one, tens and hundreds.

Not even one had the Tamil style, culture and imprints

They didn't make it that way, life is non-extant!

Not even one raises the Tamilian's spirit!

Not even one was based on higher ideals!

Not even one had a high rated actor!

Not even one lifts the spirit of down trodden!

Dresses akin to Northerners, and melody of Northerners!

Telugu kirtanas (songs) filled amidst our Tamilians

Slogas in Sanskrit! Speeches in English!

Unpronounceable Hindustani! Obscene dances!

All mixed – and deducting all these junk

Athimper and Ammami are the remaining Tamil words!

Gods of many kinds, false crown, with paper flower garden

Glasses and pearl strings – the attractive accouterment

Lord Shiva appears repeatedly to offer blessings and return!

Homely wives face toils, but overcome them!

There'll be tough song contests with rhythm

Then the drum (mridangam) will engage a solo stint

Love blooms! Similarly troubles come and leave!

Maharishis, temple and lake – these fill the space

Movie moguls – the suckers, had the formula

to suck the blood of poor souls for profit!

When one thinks about the fate of this movie art

The Capitalists creed spoils it all by deeds

This Saturn of movie business should vanish, I guess!

தயாராகி வருகிறது!

*

நடிகர்கள்:

M. G. ராமச்சந்திரன்

T. V. குமுதினி

T. S. லாலையா

A. சகுந்தலா

M. S. முருகேசன்

M. S. திருபுரம்பாள்

K. N. கொளத்தாமணி

G. M. பவீர்

N. S. கிருஷ்ணன் & T. A. மதூர்

*

மடல்கள்:

நந்தலால் ஜஷ்வத்தலால்



PAKSHIRAJA PRODUCTION

சாயா பட விளம்பரம்

(1941)

Chaaya promotional announcement

True to this poem, even MGR (an atheist in heart) had to don the role of Lord Shiva in two of his early movies to perform dances with his consort Parvathi. These were, for the Dasi Penn (literally translated as 'Prostitute Woman' or Jyothimalar, 1943), MGR as Lord Shiva danced with R. Balasaraswathi. Then, for the movie Sri Murugan (1946), MGR danced as Lord Shiva with K. Malathi. Why? he had to sacrifice his pet ideology to make a living in the competitive industry and establish himself in the front rank. The plots of Tamil movies then were dominated by Hindu mythologicals until Annadurai's paradigm shift in script writing occurred in late 1940s.

Ironically, even poet Bharathidasan himself dabbled in Tamil movies later to earn money as a lyricist! Or, as he or his fans may claim, to clean the frauds in the movie industry. One of his novel 'Unexpected Kiss' was adapted to movie under the name Ponmudi (1950, the name of hero in the story), because the original title was thought to be too controversial for the tradition-bound Tamil society; none other than Ellis Dungan directed this movie. MGR's brother M.G. Chakrapani was cast as the villain. Randor Guy had reported that the movie bombed in box office, because Dungan had daringly included love scenes of Hollywood type and it was too shocking for the Tamil audience of 1950! It was also reported that Bharathidasan died heart-broken in 1964 because his movie dealings with Sivaji Ganesan failed due to call sheet or cash flow problems.

First 15 MGR movies in subsidiary or minor roles

Some details on the 15 movies in which MGR played subsidiary or minor roles, before he was featured as the hero in Rajakumari [Princess] in 1947 are given below. As his debut movie Sathi Leelavathi had been covered in part 7, I omit much details about it here.

A check on the cast of actors of the 15 movies MGR starred in minor roles between 1936 and 1947 offers hints relating to who were MGR's

rivals then for the hero roles. Tamil film historian Randor Guy, in his interesting series 'Blast from the Past' in The Hindu daily do provide background details and story synopsis for most of these movies.

Sathi Leelavathi (1936): Produced by Manorama Films. 18,000 feet. Released on March 28, 1936. Director Ellis R. Dungan, lyrics Sunthara Vathiyar, story S.S.Vasan, script Kandasamy Mudaliar. Cast: M.K. Radha, T.S.Balaiah, N.S.Krishnan, MGR, M.S.Gnanambal.

Iru Sagotharargal (1936): produced by Parameswari Sound Pictures. Director Ellis R.Dungan, lyrics S.D.S.Yogi. Cast: K.P. Kesavan, K.K. Perumal, MGR, T.S. Balaiah, P.G. Venkatesan, M.M. Radhabhai, T.S. Krishnaveni, S.N. Vijayalakshmi, S.N. Kannamani.

Daksha Yagnam (1938): produced by Metropolitan Pictures. 17,000 feet. Released on March 31, 1938. Director Rajah Chandrasekar, script K. Thyagarajah Desigar, Music N.S.Balakrishnan. Cast: V.A. Chellappa, M.G. Nataraja Pillai, P.G.Venkatesan, N.S. Krishnan, MGR, M.M. Radhabhai, K.R.Jeyalaskshmi, T.N. Chandramma, T.A.Mathuram.

Veera Jagathis (1938): Produced by V.S.Talkies. 10,444 feet. Director T.P.Kailasam and R.Prakash. Cast: V.S.M. Rajarama Iyer, MGR.

Maya Machindra (1939): Produced by Metropolitan Pictures. 19,000 feet. Released on April 22, 1939. Director Rajah Chandrasekar, script Lakshmanadas, songs Papanasam Sivan. Cast: M.K. Radha, MGR, M.G. Chakrapani, M.R.Krishnamoorthy, N.S.Krishnan, Saratha, M.R.Radhabhai, T.A. Mathuram.

Prahalatha (1939): Produced by Salem Shankar Films. 16,000 feet. Released on November 14, 1939. Director B.N.Rao, script Vadivel Naicker, songs Papanasam Sivan, Vaithianatha Iyer, music direction Sarma brothers. Cast: R.Balasubramaniam, MGR, Master T.R.Mahalingam, N.S.Krishnan, T.S. Durairaj, M.R.Santhanalakshmi, T.A.Mathuram, P.S.Gnanam.

Vedavathi or Seetha Jananam (1941): Produced by Shyamala Pictures. 16,829 feet. Released on January 11, 1941. Director T.R.Raghunath, script Raja Chandrasekar, songs Papanasam Sivan, Rajagopala Iyer, music direction T.K. Jeyarama Iyer. Cast: M.R.Krishnamoorthi, R. Balasubramaniam, MGR, N.S.Krishnan, P.G.Venkatesan, Thavami Devi, Kumari Rukmani, T.A. Mathuram, Kolar Rajam.



MGR as Lord Shiva in Sri Murugan movie

Ashok Kumar (1941): Produced by Murugan Talkies Film Company. 19,000 feet. Released on July 7, 1941. Director Rajah Chandrasekhar, script Ilankovan, songs Papanasam Sivan, Rajagopala Iyer, 'Yaanai'

Vaithianatha Iyer, music direction Alandur Sivasubramaniam. Cast: K.K.Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, V. Nagiah, N.S.Krishnan, MGR, P. Kannamba, T.V.Kumudhini, T.A.Mathuram.

Thamizh Ariyum Perumal (1942): Produced by Uma Pictures. 16,000 feet. Released on April 25, 1942. Director T.R. Raghunath, script Ilankovan. Cast: V.A.Chellapa, T.S. Durairaj, R.Balasubramaniam, MGR, M.G. Chakrapani, M.R.Santhalakshmi, M.S. Devasena, T.S. Jaya, C.T. Rajakantham.

Dasi Penn or Jyothi Malar (1943): Produced by Bhuvanewari Pictures. 13,623 feet. Released on January 25, 1943. Director Ellis R. Dungan, music direction Lalitha Venkataraman and Saluru Rajeswara Rao. Cast: T.R. Mahalingam, MGR, N.S.Krishnan, Krishnamoorthy, R.Balasaraswathi, M.R.Santhalakshmi, T.A.Mathuram.

Harichandra (1943): produced by Sri Rajarajeshwari Film Company. 12,485 feet. Released on December 27, 1943. Director Nagabhushanam. Script T.C.Vadivel Naicker, music direction S.V.Venkataraman, lyrics C.A.Lakshumanadas. cast: P.U.Chinnappa, M.R.Swaminathan, R.Balasubramaniam, M.N.Nambiar, N.S.Krishnan, P. Kannamba, T.A.Mathuram, B.S. Chandra, Yogam, Mangalam.

Salivahanan (1944): produced by Bhaskar Pictures. 10,996 feet. Released on December 22, 1944. Director B.N. Rao, story, B.S. Ramaiah, script Kambadasan, lyrics Papanasam Sivan and Kambadasan. Cast: Ranjan, MGR, N.S.Krishnan, T.S.Balaiah, Nagarkovil Mahadevan, T.R. Rajakumari, K.L.V.Vasantham, M.R.Santhalakshmi, T.A.Mathuram.

Meera (1945): produced by Chandraprabha Cinetone. 10,990 feet. Released on November 3, 1945. Director Ellis R. Dungan, producer T. Sathasivam, Story and script Kalki and Sathasivam, lyrics Papanasam Sivan, music direction S.V.Venkataraman. Cast: V. Nagiah, Serukalatur Sama, T.S.Balaiah, MGR, T.S. DuraiRaj, M.S.Subbulakshmi, K.R. Chellam, Baby Radha.

Sri Murugan (1946): produced by Jupiter Pictures. 14,950 feet. Released on October 27, 1946. Director M. Somasundaram and V.S.Narayan. Producers Somasundaram and Mohideen, Story and script A.S.A.Sami, lyrics Papanasam Sivan, music direction S.M.Subbiah Naidu and S.V. Venkataraman. Cast: Honnappa Bhagavathar, MGR, P.S. Veerappa, Narasimha Bharathi, M.G. Chakrapani, Kali N. Ratnam, Malathi, T. Premavathi, T.V. Kumudini, U.R. Jeevaratnam, Harini, Mangalam.

Paithiakaran (1947): produced by NSK Films. 16,201 feet. Released on September 26, 1947. Director Krishnan-Panju, Producer D.Ramasamy, Story and script S.V.Sahasranamam, lyrics K.P.Kamatchi, Narayana Kavi, T.A. Sambanthamoorthy, Desika Vinayagam Pillai. Music direction C.R. Subbaraman and M.S.Gnanamani. Cast: S.V.Sahasranamam, N.S. Krishnan, MGR, D. Balasubramaniam, T.A. Mathuram, S.T. Kantha, S.R. Janaki.

Among these 15 movies, more than half were based on Hindu mythological plots; 4 were directed by Ellis R. Dungan, 3 by Raja Chandrasekar and 2 by T.R. Raghunath. Randor Guy had noted the following information:

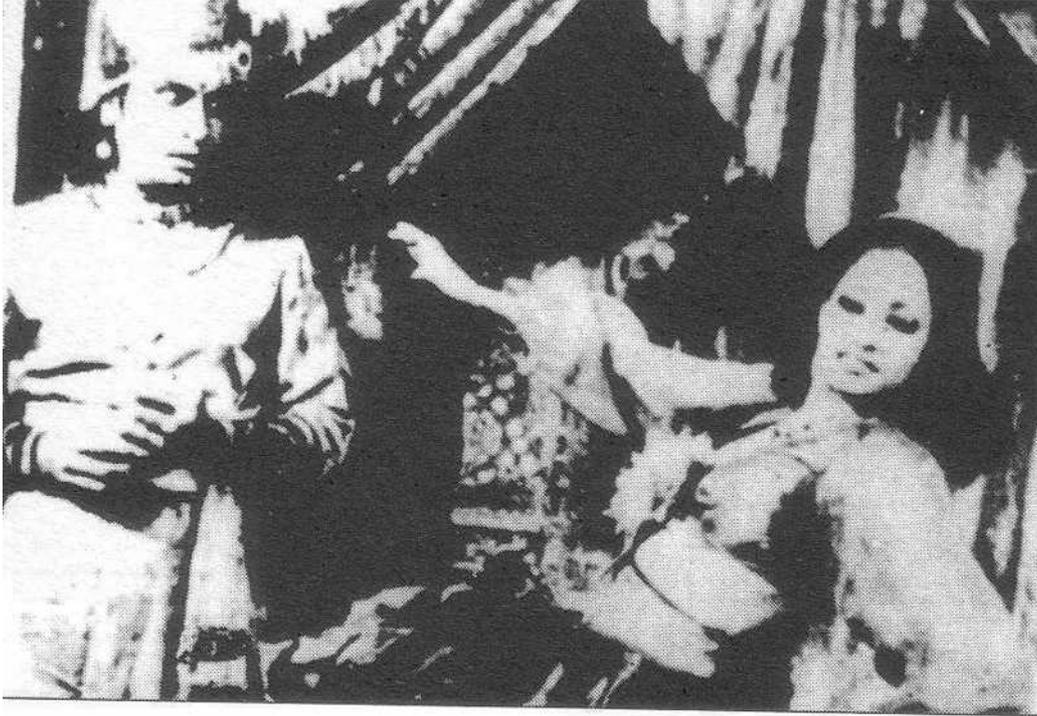
Daksha Yagnam (1938), Thamizh Ariyum Perumal (1942) and Salivahanan (1944) movies did not fare well at the box office.

Dasi Penn (1943, Woman Prostitute) performed fairly well at the box office, but 'no print of this film exists today'.

Two among the 15 movies had alternate titles! Overall, MGR was fortunate enough to have minor roles in two mega-hit movies of 1940s – Ashok Kumar (1941) and Meera (1945), both due to the popularity of the songs sung by the hero (M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar) and heroine (M.S. Subbulakshmi), excellent direction by Rajah Chandrasekar and Ellis Dungan, and script by Ilankovan and Kalki Krishnamoorthy plus T.Sathasivam respectively.

MGR's rivals for action roles during 1936 to 1947

Two of MGR's pre-hero movies, namely Harichandra (1944) and Salivahanan (1945) deserve mention in tracing MGR's ascend as a movie icon. In both of these movies the hero roles were played by P.U. Chinnappa (1916-1951, hereafter PUC) and Ranjan (1918-1983) respectively. Both were based on Hindu mythology. While in the Harichandramovie, MGR played a minor role, for the Salivahanan movie, he was cast as the villain. During the two war years (1944 and 1945), the total number of Tamil movies released had decreased to 14 and 11, due to shortage in film roles for shooting and the request of the then colonial government to the producers and financiers that war propaganda movies was the need of times that was in conflict with the sentiments of producers who sided themselves with the Indian freedom movement. MGR was lucky to have one movie in each of these years (see the PDF file of the table: number of Tamil Movies released between 1936 and 1947).



'ராஜ குமாரி' - எம்.ஜி.ஆர்.-தவமணி தேவி (1947)

MGR in Rajakumari (1947) with Jaffna-born Thavamani Devi

PUC's given name was Puthukoddai Ulaganatham Pillai Chinnaswami. Ranjan's given name was Ramanarayana Venkataramana Sarma. Both were action stars. In addition, PUC could also sing well. Thus, PUC was able to compete from his movie debut in 1936 on equal plank with M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar (other popular singing star) for the Tamil movie and music fans. Both PUC and Ranjan were born a year earlier and later to MGR.

While PUC also debuted in Tamil movies in the same year (1936) as that of MGR, Ranjan debuted in a non-talking role in Ashok Kumar(1941), five years later. In this Ashok Kumar movie, M.K.T. Bhagavathar was the singing hero and MGR himself had starred in a minor role. He was paid a monthly salary of 350 rupees for this role. However within two years, Ranjan was cast as a hero in the Mangamma Sabatham (1943) movie produced by the Gemini studios, and it turned out to be a hit movie. It appeared that Ranjan (equally talented as MGR) had leapfrogged over MGR among the debuting action heroes in early 1940s, as MGR's hero-role movie Chaaya (1942) under the Pakshiraja label was abandoned. Subsequently, in the Salivahanan (1945) movie, Ranjan was featured as the hero and MGR played the villain role. According to the Tamil movie insiders, in this particular film, there was some bad blood between Ranjan and MGR, in setting up the action scene. Within few years, Ranjan hit the bull's eye again with his villain role in Chandralekha (1948) released under the Gemini banner.

I provide a table indicating the total number of Tamil movies released between 1936 and 1947 and compare the performances of PUC and MGR for the same period. The total number of movies varies marginally from the records maintained by the industrial sources and the Censor Board. I have cited the Censorship records, as presented by Krishnaswamy and Barnow (1980). As one could see, there was a decline in the total number of movies released between 1942 and 1946.

Background to the Production Troubles faced by the Rajakumari (The Princess)

1946 was the year which turned out favorably for MGR. He had starred in a subsidiary role as Lord Shiva in the Sri Murugan mythological movie, produced by Jupiter Pictures. His dance with fellow actress Malathi (Shiva-Parvathi dance) was well received when the movie was released on October 27, 1946 for the Deepavali occasion. In that year, through the courtesy and insistence of script writer Arul Susai Anthony (A.S.A) Sami (1915-1998) who had written the script for the Sri Murugan movie, he was contracted to play the hero role in Jupiter's next movie Rajakumari (the Princess). Among those who played a prominent role in the completion of this movie, only M. Karunanidhi alive now. It was also his first Tamil movie for which he wrote the script. Before I present Karunanidhi's impressions of his experience in the production of this movie, I have to introduce Sami, who was the director of this movie. It was his first directorial effort, and it was Sami who invited Karunanidhi to be a participant in the Rajakumari production.



Director A.S.A. Sami

Like MGR, Sami too was born in Sri Lanka, of Indian Tamil parents. The third individual, who was of Ceylon background for this movie was the woman villain and Jaffna-born Kathiresan Thavamani Devi (1922-2001). More about her follows later. The entry on Sami, in the Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema (1999), offers the following details on Sami's career in Tamil cinema.

“Tamil director born and educated in Colombo, Sri Lanka; son of a theatre contractor. Quit his job as university lecturer in Colombo to move to Madras, where his play Bilhana, originally written for the radio and later performed with great success by M.K. Thyagaraja

Bhagavathar and by the TKS Brothers, went on to become a major film hit produced by TKS (1948). Sami, who scripted the film, got a job at Jupiter Studio, Coimbatore, where he wrote e.g: Sundarrao Nakkarni's Valmiki (1946), A. Kasilingam's Abhimanyu (1948, with Karunanidhi) and the story of Lanka Sathyam's Mohini(1948). His debut as director, Rajakumari, on Arabian Nights movie, he also scripted, in MGR's first hit in a lead role and put put Sami in the front-line of Tamil directors. His second film, Velaikkari, is a DMK film propaganda classic written by Annadurai... ” Both were produced by Jupiter Pictures.

Rajakumari was released on April 11, 1947. Velaikkari(Woman Servant) was released on February 2, 1949. WhileRajakumari was scripted by Karunanidhi, Anna wrote the script for Velaikkari. While MGR was the hero for the Rajakumari, his then love-interest V.N. Janaki played the lead role for Velaikkari.

Karunanidhi's reminiscence

Karunanidhi, in his autobiography Nenjukku Neethi [Justice for the Heart] recorded the following:

“I was working at the ‘Kudi Arasu’ [journal] office as a student learning from Periyar [E.V.Ramasamy Naicker] for an year [in Erode]. Then, I received an invitation from Kovai [Coimbatore]. That invitation was for writing a movie script. A.S.A. Samy was the person who sent me this invitation. With the help from friend Muthukrishnan, I went to Kovai and found the details. I had to write the script for the movie Rajakumari, to be produced by Kovai Jupiter Pictures. I asked permission from Periyar. He did permit me with the farewell, ‘Do accept the offer.’

I accepted the offer, with the condition that I'll write the script, if it does not distract my party related services. After Mr. A.S.A. Sami agreed to my request, I began writing the script. That was the movie Puratchi Nadigar [revolutionary actor] MGR starred as the hero for the first time...

My [first] wife and I stayed at a house in Singanallur near Kovai with a rent for ten rupees. After hearing that my father's health living in Tiruvarur had taken a worse turn, Padma and I rushed there. Father was struggling for his life. Our family was unable to care for him with top class treatment. Merely, local treatment was done. No other way left. For nearly 15 days, father was dangling towards death. Mother and I were seated next to him. How many memories! Father who yearned to see my progress did shed tears. He couldn't speak much. 'Have you completed the next story?', he asked softly. 'A little more left', I replied. 'I'll be finishing mine now.' Even while suffering from the grip of death, his natural literary wit was aptly delivered.

Only a month ago, he wished to see the newly released 'Rajakumari' movie. He had lost his eyesight then. However, he was keen on listening to the script dialogue penned by me and did see it at a theatre in Tiruvarur. He was so delighted to see me grow as a writer."

MGR's reminiscence

Karunanidhi's in the second volume of his autobiography had included a segment of the speech made by MGR in June 1971, while opening a people settlement section of his then constituency Parangimalai and naming it as 'Karunanidhipuram'. I provide the translation of MGR's speech, which appears in Karunanidhi's autobiography.

"I'm delighted to take part in this opening function. The Tamil Nadu chief minister Kalaingar and I have a friendship link for over twenty years. Then, I was at Coimbatore. Because there was a spread of plague disease, he had sent his family to native place, and he lived with me in my house. At that time, the rent for my house was only twelve rupees. We two were together. While I was a Congress Party man, he was a member of the Self Respect Movement.

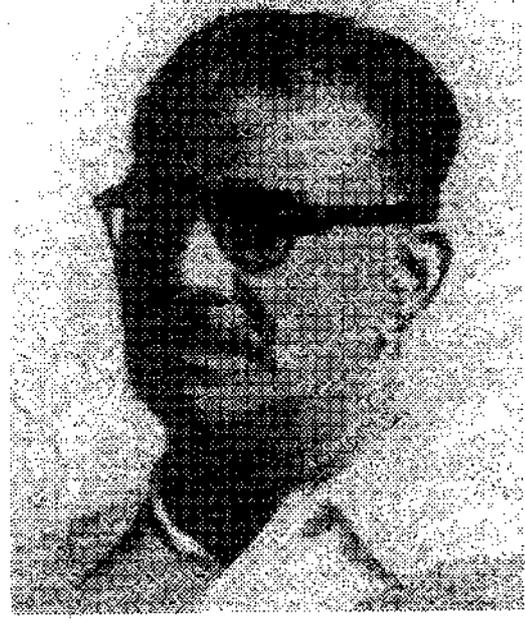
In those days, I attempted to pull him to my side. But what happened? I was the one who was pulled to his side. Now, he is the president of the

Kazhagam, and I function as the Treasurer of Kazhagam. All this happened, because of his 'pull'.

While at Coimbatore, many years ago, he wrote the script for movies such as Rajakumari and Abhimanyu. But in the title credits of those movies, his name was excluded. Merely, because his name did not appear in the title credits, he never failed to show his talents and skills. He worked hard. Even though his name didn't appear, he was satisfied that his 'thoughts' had been exposed. He never failed to include his party-linked thoughts in the movies."



ஐபிடர் மொய்தீன்



ஐபிடர் சோமு

Jupiter Pictures Producers Somasundaram and Mohideen

Rajakumari - A movie that was almost not made

But, Karunanidhi's contribution to this Rajakumari was obliterated as a 'script assistant' to A.S.A.Sami. Though a disappointment for the young script writer (then in early 20s) he would soar as a trendy writer of alliterative Tamil in the next few years. Not only Karunanidhi, every major hand in the making of this movie had disappointments and faced 'troubles'. Jupiter Pictures producers M. Somasundaram and S.K.

Mohideen were first disappointed with the selection of hero MGR and the selection of an extra in the company's pay role as a villain, by the director. Director Sami was disappointed by the half-hearted approval offered by the producers for his early efforts. Hero MGR was in trouble during the making of the movie, because he had to cop out from playing the 'Sivaji' role to the drama scripted by Anna and also suffered from the fear that his debut movie as a hero may be abandoned by the producers in midway. Lady villain Thavamani Devi was disappointed that her 'sexy' dress designs were being vetoed by the director. A senior character actor M.R.Saminathan who played the role of magician had disappointment with the debut director Sami.

Randor Guy, in a chapter on MGR, provides the following tidbit. "Sami, making his debut as a director, began shooting the film at the Central Studios, Coimbatore. When he had finished shooting a part of it, it was seen by the producers and S.K.Mohideen, one of them, did not like what he saw and wanted the project to be shelved. M. Somasundaram, the top man in Jupiter, was not sure what he wanted to do after this opinion. Sami, however, argued that the future of MGR and his too were at stake and virtually begged Somasundaram to permit him to complete the film. 'Instead of burning it at 5,000 feet, you can do so at 11,000', he argued and Somasundaram gave him the green signal to go ahead and complete the film. When it was released, the film turned out to be a hit. MGR, manly and muscular, was hailed as an action hero and compared with the Hollywood superstar Douglas Fairbanks..."

*Further details on the troubles in bringing this movie to completion, appear in Aranthai Narayanan's book, *Thamizh Cinemavin Kathai* [The Story of Tamil Cinema]. I provide the following verbatim translation below.*

" 'Sami, why not you write a story script, and direct it?' asked Jupiter Somu. A.S.A. Sami accepted this offer. Jupiter Somu also made two conditions. (1) First produce me a story. If I accept, you can direct it. The story should be like the recent successful

hits Aryamala and Jagathala Prathaban. (2) Except for a few roles, you should use the actors who are in our company pay role.

With the help from cameraman V. Krishnan who is well versed in magic shots, Sami produced a raja-rani story and presented it to Somu. The story was appealing to Somu. 'I have named the movie! It's Rajakumari. Why? T.R. Rajakumari (1922?-1999; then a leading actress) will be the heroine for this movie. Hero – P.U. Chinappa.'

'As we had planned previously, why not make this movie in a low budget, with actors who have yet to establish their reputation,' retorted Sami. He did not want to experiment with star actors in his first movie.

Somu asked, 'OK. Who can be the hero and heroine?'

Sami told, 'In the Sri Murugan movie [released in 1946, produced by the same Jupiter Pictures] MGR and Malathi had acted forcefully as Lord Shiva and Parvathi. Their duet dance was well received. They also had good chemistry between themselves. Why not use them as hero and heroine?'

The news leaked. M.G. Ramachandran couldn't believe his ears. He went and checked with Somu. Somu in turn, double checked.

"Why Sami? Are you insisting that we should have our Ramachandran as the hero for this Rajakumari movie? Then, MGR was observing the response from Sami.

'If you offer encouragement and support, I have the confidence that I can finish this movie successfully with Ramachandran as the hero.', quipped Sami.

Work began. During the shooting of Udayana-Vasavadhatta (a movie released by another company in 1946 for which Sami wrote the script, and Chidambaram S.Jayaraman was the music director), when music director Chidambaram Jayaraman had solicited a suitable opportunity to his brother in law, A.S.A.Sami invited that brother in law. M. Karunanidhi joined the team.

In the story, there is a queen. She has a body guard. The hero had to fight with this bodyguard and win. Somu had contracted a famous body builder to play that role.

M.G. Ramachandran queried Somu: 'In your company, there is a suitable actor for that role. Why you had to invite someone from outside?'

Somu – 'Whom are you talking about?'

'We have Sandow Sinnappa Thevar.'

'He is an extra, earning a monthly salary in our company. We have to use another well-known guy.'

MGR's response: 'You don't know the talent of Sinnappa. I know well. He fights vigorously. It will be a help for a young actor. Please choose him.'

Somu – 'Even for you, this is your first opportunity as a hero. It will be great, if a well known guy fights with you. There's a body builder well known as Kamaldeen pailwan. I'm interested in him.'

MGR – 'Excuse me. You have to use Sinnappa. If not, I don't need this fighting scene.'

Finally, it was decided to have Sinappa Thevar in that role.

K. Thavamani Devi had the woman villain role. She had to distract the man villain T.S.Balaiah with her dance. When she arrived at the set, all were aghast, including the director Sami. She had appeared with a blouse (and without a bra), exposing her cleavages. Director Sami requested her to tighten both sides. Thavamani Devi in turn retorted, 'The scene to be shot is a dance to distract the villain. This should be the way, if it looks natural' and rejected director's suggestion. Even though, it was a night shooting, Sami had to call the producer Somu to the floor to settle this dispute. Somu had a word with Thavamani Devi and finally

a compromise was made. She had to place a big paper flower in between to hide her cleavage.

During the shooting, there was conflict between M.R. Swaminathan who played the magician role. Swaminathan complained to Somu; ‘You have made someone who came from Ceylon yesterday into a director. What’s his age, and my age? I’m a senior actor.’ ”

From these details, one could infer that if Rajakumari project was abandoned by the Jupiter Pictures, the bigger losers would have been MGR and Sami, as well as Karunanidhi. All three had a stake on their future career trends; MGR as a hero actor, Sami as the trendy director and Karunanidhi as a trendy script writer. Somehow, they made it certain that the movie was completed with some delay in shooting schedule. One could also guess that MGR was successful with producer Somasundaram in negotiating to have Sandow Sinappa Thevar (an in-house extra) as his fight rival, rather than a well-known body builder, who was unknown to him. Considering the previous ‘bad blood’ experience he had with Ranjan in the Salivahanan movie, MGR was cautious in not hurting his body (which was his prime insurance) in fight scenes with an unknown personality. This one, he won. But, he lost (or negotiated tactfully to exclude himself) the offered chance to play the ‘Sivaji’ role in Anna’s drama in 1946.

Sivaji Ganesan’s reminiscence of his ‘big’ opportunity

This is what the 18 year old Sivaji Ganesan (aka V.C. Ganesamoorthy), who replaced MGR for that Sivaji role had reminisced in his autobiography:

“It was the time when the Dravida Kazhagam party was growing rapidly. The year was 1946. Preparations were on in Chennai conducting the Seventh Conference for Self-Respect Awareness (Yezhavathu Suyamariyathai Mahanadu). To enhance this further Anna wrote the play Sivaji kanda Hindu Rajyam... Originally, M.G.

Ramachandran was chosen to play the role of Sivaji and the costumes tailored for him. For some reason MGR turned down the offer.

With hardly a week left for the play, D.V.Narayana Swamy, the stage manager, was extremely worried. He told Anna that MGR had refused to act this role. Both had a brainstorming session to find alternatives. They keenly examined the prospect of finding a substitute among us. I suppose they had looked for a man with a large nose and big eyes and I must have fitted the bill, because they trained their eyes on me!”

Karunanidhi, in his autobiography recorded why MGR refused to act in that ‘Sivaji’ drama scripted by Anna, with a derisive bite on MGR as follows:

“There were advertisements in Anna’s ‘Dravida Nadu’ newspaper that M.G.Ramchandrar would act as Sivaji on that drama. Then, [my] friend M.G.Ramachandran was acting in movies with the ‘Ramchandrar’ [stage] name. But suddenly, he had announced that he could not act in Anna’s drama. Others had threatened him that if he did act in that drama, his future prospects in the art world would suffer. Thus, via Nadigamani D.V. Narayanaswami (hereafter D.V.N.), he had informed his decision to Anna.

That MGR had suggested to D.V. N. that Anna’s drama script had to be re-written in many places, and after hearing this comment, Anna was surprised and didn’t permit to change the lines according to MGR’s wish and having this as a reason, MGR had rejected to act. This had been told by D.V.N. himself in many meetings.’

One should note that when Karunanidhi wrote these lines in 1987, he had fallen out of MGR and wanted to place him as an inferior actor in comparison to Sivaji Ganesan. Again, it could be inferred that at the age of 29, MGR was more interested on establishing his career as an action movie star, than being a drama star. One cannot blame him for this choice, because Rajakumari was being shot in Coimbatore (and it was facing so many problems during shooting), but the Sivaji drama (a

propaganda item for Dravidar Kazhagam) was to be staged in Chennai. And, at that time, he was a Congress Party supporter, as was noted by MGR himself. MGR's rejection in 1946 turned out to be a lucky break for Sivaji Ganesan in dramas, who himself had to wait for another six years for his lucky break in movies.

For Rajakumari movie, MGR was contracted to have a salary of 2,500 rupees, paid in 200 rupees per month installment. However, as it took 18 months to complete the shootings (with all the troubles it faced on its progress), MGR had to act an additional six months without pay! Sandow Sinnappa Thevar paid back the trust MGR had on his skills and standing up for him against the producer's wish. Subsequently, when he in turn became a successful producer in 1960s and 1970s, MGR had acted in 16 of the 'Thevar Films' productions between 1956 and 1972.

Budding hero between 1947 and 1949



Kathiresan Thavamani Devi in 1992

by Sachi Sri Kantha, August 11, 2013

Part 9

Last few months had seen the deaths of quite a few Tamil movie personalities who were involved with MGR during his film career. The obituary list includes actresses Rajasulochana and Manjula, playback singer T.M. Soundararajan, lyricist Vaali, and music director T.K. Ramamoorthy of the Viswanathan-Ramamoorthy duo. Among these, lyricist Vaali (born as S. Rangarajan in 1931) had recorded ample

anecdotes in his 1995 autobiography 'Naanum Intha Noorandum' (This Century and Me) about his interaction with patron MGR. Those still living among the actors' clan who had worked with MGR during 1950s includes fellow actor-politician S.S. Rajendran, heroines Anjali Devi, M.N. Rajam, and the then 'new face' B. Saroja Devi as well as comedian Manorama. Not to be forgotten, among MGR's acquaintances of late 1940s, was the then Jupiter's 'office boy' named M.S.Viswanathan, who later blossomed into music director.

In this part, I'll focus on the period between 1947 and 1949, when MGR had to play supporting roles and wait for his 'big break' as the Tamil hero. India received its independence on August 15, 1947. As it often happens in the movie industry, ill luck or 'bad breaks' of other rival heroes (especially P.U. Chinnappa and Ranjan) at pertinent times in combination with change in popular taste did propel MGR's fortune. Ranjan's move to Bombay to accept offers in Hindi movies in 1948 and Chinnappa's premature death in 1951 at the age of 35, opened up a void which MGR was able to capture and keep for almost quarter of a century as an action star. Below I also provide a comparison of MGR's film career with that of John Wayne, Hollywood's greatest action hero.

John Wayne and MGR Career comparison

MGR's supporting roles between 1947 and 1949

Even after popular success of his debut movie Rajakumari (released on April 11, 1947), MGR had to content himself by starring in supporting roles in the movies of two leading Tamil singing stars (namely M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar and P.U. Chinnappa). The five movies in which MGR played supporting roles and their release dates are as follows:

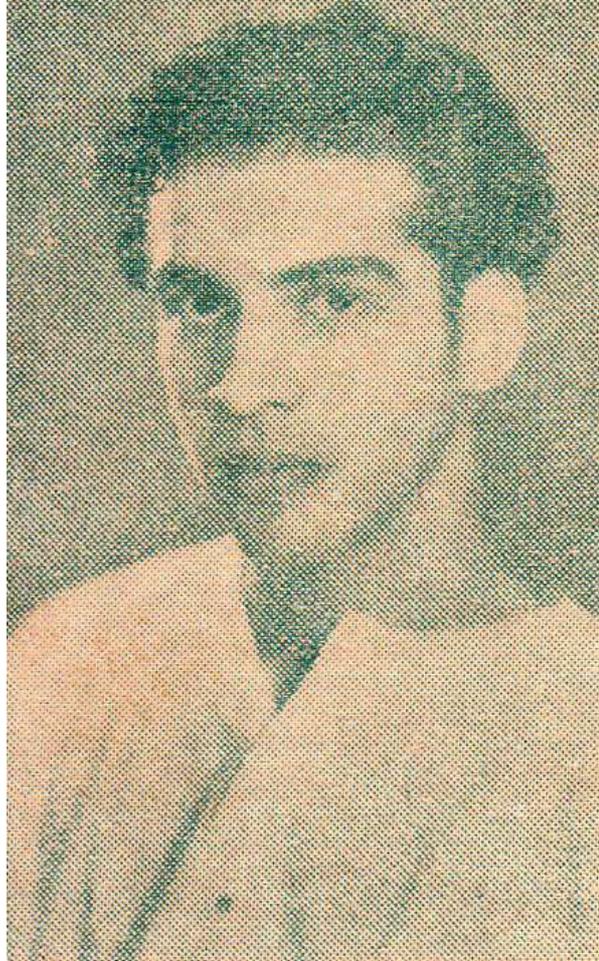
Paithiyakaran (NSK Films, Sept. 26, 1947)

Abimanyu (Jupiter Pictures, May 6, 1948)

Rajamukthi (Narendra Pictures, October 9, 1948)

Mohini (Jupiter Pictures, October 31, 1948)

Ratnakumar (Murugan Talkie Film, December 15, 1949)



Ranjan, one of MGR's movie rivals in late 1940s

Synopses and some details relating to production about these five movies had been provided by Randor Guy in his 'Blast from the Past' series between 2007 and 2010. In this part, I provide some context to MGR's career development which has not been touched by Randor Guy.

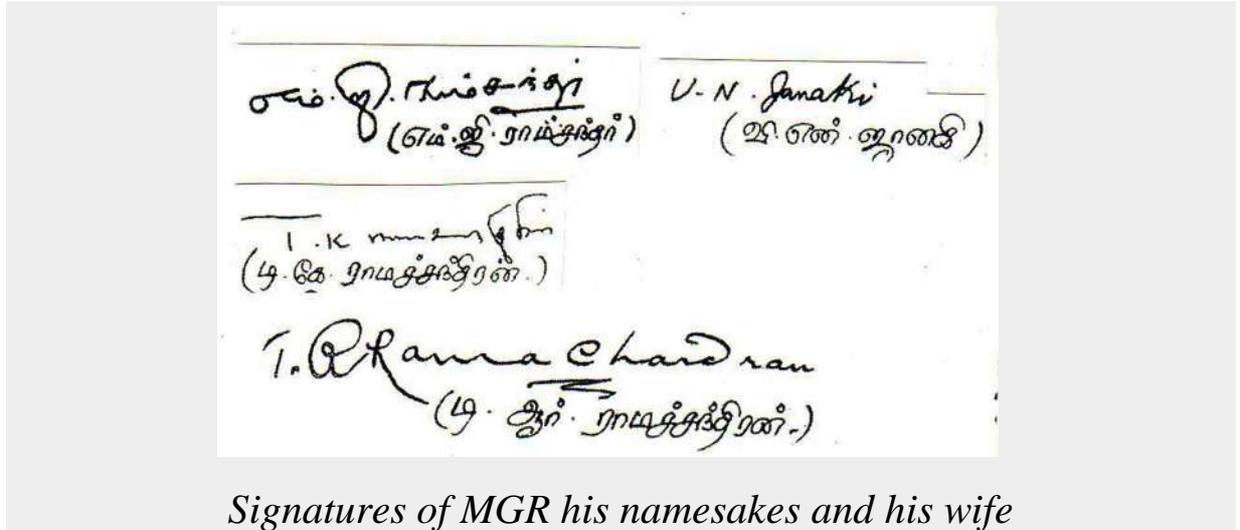
Paithiyakaran (Mad Man) movie was produced by T.A. Mathuram, the actress-wife of comedian N.S. Krishnan, while the latter was under incarceration on involvement with the murder of muck-raking journalist C.N.Lakshmikanthan in November 1944. The movie, based on social-

reformist Tamil play with the same name, was released a month after India received independence in August 1947. The script for this movie's social theme was prepared by popular drama actor S.V. Sahasranamam, who himself played the lead role. Mathuram played a dual role as heroine and comedian. While as a comedian she teamed with her husband Krishnan, but as a heroine she teamed with MGR's character in the movie and both sang a duet song!

Jupiter Pictures which produced Rajakumari (1947) also released two movies in 1948 (Abhimanyu and Mohini) in which MGR had non-hero roles. In the same year, two movies (Chandralekha under Gemini label, and Naam Iruvar under AVM banner) which had greater popular appeal were also released. Compared to these two movies that featured actors (M.K. Radha and Ranjan in Chandralekha, as well as singing-star T.R.Mahalingam in Naam Iruvar) with whom MGR had co-billing in his early movies, MGR's four movies released during 1948 and 1949 were marginally popular with the audience. As he had played only supporting roles in these movies, the lack of financial success for these movies cannot be pinned on MGR.

MGR was a co-star in the Raja Mukthi featuring Bhagavathar, who himself produced this movie. The flop of Bhagavathar's Raja Mukthi was a blessing in disguise for MGR. While it signaled the end of Bhagavathar's dominance in Tamil movies following his 30 month incarceration on a criminal case, it also introduced to MGR, his future third wife Vaikom Narayani (V.N.) Janaki.

1949 had only one MGR movie released; again in another supporting role in Rathnakumar featuring Chinnappa as the hero. In the billing of both Bhagavathar's Raja Mukthi and Chinnappa's Rathnakumar, multi-talented Paluvayi Bhanumathi (1925-2005) from Andhra Pradesh had appeared. She would be a ranking presence as a heroine in MGR's notable movies of 1950s.



Signatures of MGR his namesakes and his wife

Both Chinnappa (1916-1951) and Ranjan (1918-1983) were action-movie stars, who were born a year before and after MGR's birth. The given names of both were Puthukoddai Ulaganatha Pillai Chinnasami and Ramanarayana Venkataramana Sarma, respectively. As is common in movie industry, MGR also in his early career opted the stylish stage name 'Ramachandar', to distinguish himself from other actors carrying the same Ramachandran name (T.R. Ramachandran and T.K. Ramachandran; there was also another Ramachandran, who opted the nick name Ramanna, a sibling of heroine Rajakumari. This Ramanna, later became a producer-director of many MGR movies in 1950s and 1960s.) For interest, I have assembled a montage of signatures MGR, his two Ramachandran contemporaries as well as that of his wife Janaki in a scan. Whereas other three have signed in English, MGR had signed in Tamil as 'M.G. Ramchandran'.



‘மோகினி’ – எம்.ஜி.ராம்சுந்தர், வி.என்.ஜானகி (1948)

MGR and V.N. Janaki pair in Mohini (1948)

Both Chinnappa and MGR, from poverty-tinged upbringing, had similar educational background and joined Madurai Original Boys Company drama troupe. Though their talents were familiar to each other, and both debuted in Tamil movie in 1936. Chinnappa’s stars shined brighter

due to his combined singing and martial arts (such as staff fencing, known as silambam in Tamil) skills. As such, Chinnappa debuted as a hero in Jupiter Picture's production Chandrakantha, while MGR had to content with a minor inspector role in Sathi Leelavathi. This movie was directed by P.K. Raja Sandow (1894-1942), the silent movie star who was also from Puthukottai, Tamil Nadu. Akin to Sathi Leelavathi, the plot for Chandrakantha was also based on a novel by J.R. Rangaraju by the same name.

In the next 15 years, Chinnappa starred as a singing-action hero in 24 movies. His last movie Sutharsan was released after his premature death on September 23, 1951. The reason for a young, healthy and active guy dying suddenly within a couple of minutes was hard to believe. As such, the cause of Chinnappa's sudden death has not been clarified. Was it accidental, or was it from a self-induced orgy of excessive indulgence in drinking? Even Tamil movie historians like Aranthai Narayanan and Randor Guy have resisted in divulging the secrets. According to a recent 2011 report, Chinnappa had gone to a theater in his native Puthukoddi with his friends to see N.S. Krishnan's own production 'Manamagal' movie. Then, while in the company of his friends at home, he had quipped, 'feeling faintish' and vomited blood. Within few minutes, Chinnappa had died.

In contrast to these two, Ranjan, from a relatively rich family, was a man of multi talents. He graduated from the Christian College, Madras with a physics honors degree. He was also an aviator, musician-dancer, journalist, critic and a magician! Ranjan's star (in a villain role) rose high with the April 9th 1948 release of Chandralekha movie, under Gemini banner. Mogul S.S. Vasan had spent an exorbitant sum of three million rupees to produce this movie in more than three years and promoted it valiantly. After its success in Tamil language, Vasan reproduced the movie in Hindi and made it a success in Bombay as well. Chandralekha's success in Bombay indirectly affected MGR's career as well. Ranjan, his then rival for hero roles in Tamil movies, shifted his focus to star in Hindi movies. There, he did enjoy some

success as a Hindi movie star for a decade (with movies such as Nishan 1949, Mangala 1951, Shin Shinaki Boobla Boo 1952, Baghdad 1952, Shahenshah 1953, Baghi 1953, Baap Beti 1954, Kismet 1956, Paristan 1957, Baghi Sipahi 1958, Madari 1959, and Commander 1959). But, after his sojourn in Bombay, Ranjan did return to Tamil movies in mid 1950s to star in a couple of movies like Neelamalai Thirudan (1957) and Raja Malaya Simhan (1959). However, by this time, MGR had established himself firmly and Ranjan failed to usurp MGR's status. It is unfortunate for Ranjan that he had spread his talents so thin, that he was not even credited with an entry in the authoritative Encyclopedia of India Cinema!

In the mythological Abhimanyu movie of 1948 produced by Jupiter Pictures, MGR played a supporting role of Arjuna (father of hero Abhimanyu) in the Hindu epic Maha Bharatha. Released a month after the release of Gemini's Chandralekha movie, Abhimanyu's success at box-office was muted. Again, the uncredited script writer for Abhimanyu was M. Karunanidhi. But, in place of his name, A.S.A. Samy's name was included in the title credits. The reason offered by Jupiter's producer Somasundaram was that Karunanidhi had to pay his dues before gaining status as a script writer. In the next Jupiter Pictures movie Mohini released five months later, in which MGR again played a supporting role, and for the first time was paired with V.N. Janaki, his future third wife. The plot, according to Randor Guy's synopsis, was a cross between Shakespeare's 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' and the Arabian Nights tale 'The Magic Horse'. A.S.A. Samy was again identified as the script writer. This magic horse was made of wood, but activated by engines to fly. Camera tricks helped the wooden horse to perform unusual feats!



P.U. Chinnappa (1916-1951)

Manthiri Kumari (Minister's Daughter) was produced by Modern Theatres, one of the most successful studios owned by disciplinarian T.R. Sundaram (1907-1963), and located in Salem town, Tamil Nadu. It's first release was in 1937 with the title 'Sathi Ahalya', which was the debut movie for Kathiresan Thavamani Devi. As indicated in part 9 of this series, Jaffna-born Thavamani Devi had a leading role in MGR's Rajakumari movie. Even prior to that, she had starred in one of MGR's earlier movies Vethavathi or Seetha Jananam in 1941. Thavamani Devi had two successful movies. First was, the mythological Sakunthalai (1940), in which Carnatic Diva M.S. Subbulakshmi was featured in the title role, and Thavamani Devi played the temptress Menaka role. Second was, Vanamohini (1941) – a Tamil adaptation of jungle Tarzan movie.

In 1992, Thavamani Devi (at the age of 64) had offered an interview to the Ananda Vikatan weekly, in which she had described marginally her interaction with mogul T.R. Sundaram and her travails with other Tamil movie producers. Here are the excerpts in translation:

“Then, we were living at Colombo. Our native place was near Jaffna. We were of Brahmin line. Dad Kathiresa Subramaniam was a justice. Uncle Balasingham was a minister in colonial Ceylon government. All in our family were educated, and rich too! After five male siblings, my parents wished for a girl and prayed in many temples. This was the origin of my name Thavamani Devi (Penance-jewel Princess!). As such, I was the pet (for my parents)...

I was around 13. T.R. Sundaram, the boss of Modern Theatres, had heard about me through his friends sent one of his assistants to Ceylon to book me. At first, dad rejected this offer. However, the assistant somehow pressed dad’s agreement, and gave 10,000 rupees as advance.

We reached Tamil Nadu. We were offered a house within studio compounds. On the first day of testing, when I spoke the lines with much emotion, T.R. Sundaram had come to like my delivery. Thus, I became the heroine of ‘Sathi Ahalya’ movie. T.R.Sundaram treated us very promptly offering all facilities for our welfare. In the absence of shooting, none (including Sundaram) would dare to visit our house. That sort of treatment made us happy. After ‘Sathi Ahalya’, I had movie offers for ‘Shyam Sundar’ and ‘Seetha Jananam’. To act in these movies, I traveled from Ceylon. All these were produced by good companies. After the death of mother, dad also retired from his position, and...I settled in Chennai with dad.

T.R.Sundaram and dad became close friends. To relieve his tension from movie business, Sundaram and dad played chess. When both were engaged in chess, no one should bother them. [That was the condition]. I’d never dare to approach them. Once when I recommended to Sundaram that for the ‘Uttama Puthiran’ movie, why not offer chance to P. U. Chinnappa when they were engaged in chess, I’d never forget the

scolding I received from him for disturbing the chess game. At the same time, I cannot forget mentioning that he did choose Chinnappa for that movie.

[It is unfortunate that] later I became a victim of ‘casting couch seduction’, because of my strong will of not to entertain the approaches of some producers and directors. Due to my resistance, I lost many opportunities... After the death of my dad, I couldn’t even return to Ceylon. Even when I thought of tutoring dance, music classes, there was opposition even for this effort. From all angles, I was threatened with a ‘shadow war’ in Chennai for almost 10 years. Then, for piece of my mind, I moved to Rameswaram. I married a widower Kodilinga Sastri in November 1962, and live here now forgetting my past connection to the movie world.”

This brief interview-expose by Thavamani Devi in 1992 was a periodic revelation on the foxes and vultures of Chennai movie land who circled young actresses in 1940s and 1950s. In a posthumous article on Thavamani Devi, Randor Guy had presented an unflattering portrayal of her career decline as “She began to slide down the grease pole. Extravagant life style, advancing age, lack of discipline in work ethos, other problems and more did not help her.” This I guess, was the view of the male chauvinistic angle of Madras cinema industry. But, in 1992, Thavamani Devi was forthright in exposing the dark side of the industry’s patrons. But, there were disciplined producers like T.R. Sundaram, about whose work ethics even poet Kannadasan had offered praise.

Between 1950 and 1956, Sundaram would direct and release three MGR movies under Modern Theatre’s label. These were, Manthiri Kumari (1950), Sarvathikari (The Dictator, 1951) and Alibababum Narpathu Thirudargalum (Ali Baba and Forty Thieves, 1956). The last mentioned became the first film shot entirely in color for MGR as well as for the Tamil movies.

MGR's ascent to iconic rank began with the release of Manthiri Kumari (Minister's Daughter) in 1950. After struggling in side lines for almost 15 years, with 20 movies to his credit (with the exception of Rajakumari in 1947, his sole hero billing), he succeeded in reaching the top, from which he would never be toppled for the next 27 years! Professional misfortunes or risks (such as a career-threatening leg injury in a 1958 play, even a near-death experience resulting from an assassination attempt by senior actor M.R. Radha in 1967, financing and producing three movies on his own) and dabbling in local politics would not blow him out. It was not in his character to play a subsidiary role or a villain role or a 'guest' role for few minutes. Even when he was billed with his other contemporary heroes, MGR was the hero for the rest of his 113 movies. As was his wont, he would collaborate with his two equally talented contemporaries, Sivaji Ganesan (1928-2001) and Gemini Ganesan (1920-2005) only in one movie, as the sole hero. The two movies which had this rare recognition were Koondukili ('Caged Parrot', with Sivaji Ganesan; R.R.Pictures, 1954) and Muharasi ('Face Constellation', with Gemini Ganesan; Devar Films, 1966).

MGR and John Wayne

In my view, many of the hagiographic short biographies on MGR published in Tamil suffer from lack of comparison of MGR's movie career to any of his contemporaries in other movie industries, either within India or beyond India. This partly reflects the ignorance of MGR biographers to simultaneous development in other cinematic and political cultures. So that, this deficiency has to be rectified, I have made an attempt to compare the movie career of MGR with that of one Hollywood hero, whose claim to fame can be matched appropriately. The Hollywood hero of my choice was none other than John Wayne (born Marion Mitchell Morrison, 1907-1979). I provide a PDF table comparing the careers of MGR and John Wayne. In it, I have identified 17 criteria from birth to death which perfectly match the careers of Tamil Nadu and Hollywood icons of cinema. About career comparison

of MGR and other movie stars in publications in English by other film critics.



Marutha Naatu Ilavarasi (1950) MGR with V.N.Janaki (1)

Mythologies in the movies of India and Hollywood

There is a derisive Tamil idiom which pokes fun at half-baked scholarship. It is, 'Kundu chattikul irunthu kuthirai ootuvathu pola' [translation: Like horse riding within a hollow pot]. One cannot ride a horse with the narrow confines of space (i.e., knowledge), isn't it? In the past, scholarship on MGR's movies had suffered from the half-baked scholars among Tamils, who had a 'Marxist-socialist-progressive' attitude. M.S.S. Pandian and K. Sivathamby were two of them. Even American academics like Robert Hardgrave Jr and Eric Barnouw somewhat had failed in comparing MGR's movie career with that of his contemporary John Wayne, the Hollywood hero. This was one of the reasons, why I began writing this series.

Another reason was that, this is the centenary year of Indian movies. Rajah Harischandra (King Harischandra), produced by Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (1870-1944) aka Dadasaheb Phalke with a capital of Indian rupees 15,000 was released in 1913 as a full length feature film at the Coronation Cinema in Bombay. The movie was 3,700 feet long (roughly one hour of projection time, at a projection speed of

about 3,000-4,000 feet per hour). Raja Harischandra was a popular Hindu mythological story from Mahabharata epic, and Phalke was backed by a Nadkarni, a Bombay dealer in photographic goods. Even if I cannot cover the entire history of Indian movies in many languages for deficit in knowledge and lack of resources, I thought of writing a biography of MGR, one of the pivotal figure in Tamil movies and politics, based on my collections.

Thus, in this part, I provide a comparison on the careers of MGR and John Wayne (two adept horse riders in movie history!), and this had not been attempted by any previous analysts who had studied MGR's movie career. Hindu mythology was the mine source for Indian movies. Similarly, Hollywood movies also depended on the mythology of immigrant American nation, which can be tagged as 'Westerns' (derisively tagged as 'horse operas'). Film historian Leslie Halliwell identifies the following special characteristics of 'Westerns': (1) Westerns have been with us almost as long as the cinema itself. (2) It is natural enough that almost all westerns should have come from America. (3) The attractions of western stories included natural settings, cheapness of production, ready-made plots capable of infinite variation, and a general air of tough simplicity which was saleable the world over. Like Indian mythology plots enhanced by songs, even Hollywood westerns had a singing cowboy character in 1940s and few performers like Gene Autry (1907-1998) and Roy Rogers (1911-1998) became identified with this character.



Malai Kallan (1954) – MGR

Movies of MGR and John Wayne in 1950s decade

In the previous part, I provided a career comparison table of MGR and John Wayne. Let me elaborate on this comparison. In their movie careers, the total number of movies starred by MGR (between 1936 and 1978) and John Wayne (between 1928 and 1976) were 136 and 152 respectively. In the 1950s decade, both featured in almost equal number of movies; MGR in 25, and John Wayne in 22. With a few notable exceptions, both chose the type of vehicle in which they had expertise and had framed their minds to gain fame. John Wayne focused on 'American historical adventures, including Westerns' and MGR's focus was on 'Tamil historical costume adventures' [the so-called 'Raja-Rani kathai (King-Queen stories)].

The name list of 25 movies, their release dates, screen writers and directors details (in chronological sequence) of MGR movies are given below. I provide appropriate English translations of the Tamil movie titles to the best of my knowledge. Shared credits for either script writing or direction are indicated by hyphen between the names.

Maruthanattu Ilavarasi (Princess from Maruthaland) April 1950, M.Karunanidhi, A.Kasilingam.

Manthiri Kumari (Minister's Daughter) June 1950, (adoption from ancient Tamil-Buddhist epic Kundalakesistory) M. Karunanidhi, Ellis Dungan -T.R.Sundaram.

Marma Yogi (The Secret Mystic) Feb 1951, (a mix of British novelist Marrie Correlli 1886 novel Vendetta and Robin Hood legend) A.S.A.Sami, K.Ramnath.

Sarvadhikari (The Dictator) Sept. 1951, A.V.P.Asaithambi, T.R.Sundaram.

Andaman Kaithi (Prisoner in Andaman Island) March 1952, Ku.Sa.Krishnamoorthy, V. Krishnan.

Kumari (Young Girl) April 1952, Ku.Sa. Krishnamoorthy, R.Padmanaban

Yen Thangai (My Younger Sister) May 1952, T.S.Nadarajan-K.M.Govindarajan, C.H.Narayanamoorthy

Naam (We) March 1953, M. Karunanidhi, A.Kasilingam

Panakkari (Rich Woman) April 1953 (original Anna Karenina story of Leo Tolstoy), K.S.Gopalakrishnan

Genova (Genova) June 1953, (original, a Bible story mixed with myth); Suratha-Ilankovan-Nedumaran, F.Nagoor

Malai Kallan (Mountain Thief) July 1954, M. Karunanidhi, S.M.Sri Ramulu Naidu

Koondu KiLLi (Caged Parrot) Aug 1954, Vinthan, T.R.Ramanna

Gul E-Bhagavali (Flower of Bhagavali) July 1955, (original, a Persian folk tale) Thanjai Ramaiahdas, T.R.Ramanna

Alibababum 40 Thirudarkalum (Alibaba and 40 thieves) Jan 1956(original Arabian Tales) T.R.Sundaram (both, credited script writer and director). One may doubt why the real script writer went unidentified!

Madurai Veeran (Hero of Madurai), April 1956, Kannadasan, Yoganand

Thaiku Pin Thaaram (Wife after the Mother), Sept 1956, S.Ayyapillai, M.A.Thirumugam

Sakravarthi Thirumagal (Princess of the Emperor), Jan 1957, Ilankovan, P.Neelakandan

Rajarajan (King of Kings), April 1957, Ilankovan, T.V.Sundaram

Puthumai Pithan (Crazy guy for Novelty), Aug 1957, M. Karunanidhi, T.R.Ramanna

Mahadevi (The Great Princess), Nov 1957, Kannadasan, Sundar Rao Nadkarni

Nadodi Mannan (Vagabond and the King), August 1958, Ravindar, MGR

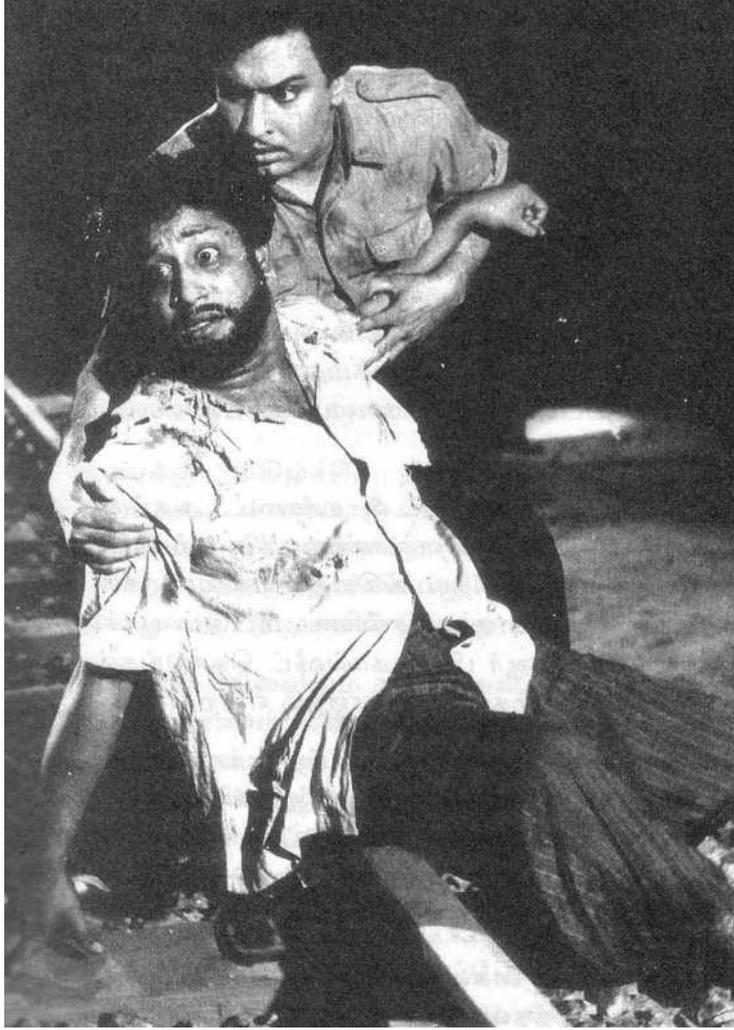
Thai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali (Mother who tied the sacred thread to her Daughter), Dec 1959, Rama Arangannal, R.R.Chandran

Baghdad Thirudan (Thief of Baghdad), May 1960, A.S.Muthu, T.P.Sundaram

Raja Desingu (Raja of Desingu Land), September 1960, Kannadasan-Makkalanban, T.R.Ragunath

Mannathi Mannan (King of Kings), October 1960, Kannadasan, M. Nadesan.

MGR had formally associated himself with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party, led by Annadurai in 1953. From the above list, we could note the following as a result of this association. First, M. Karunanidhi (b. 1924) was the script writer for 5 of the 25 movies. Secondly, poet Kannadasan (1927-1981) was the script writer for 4 movies (in one, he shared the credit with another guy with a pen-name Makkalanban). Thirdly, two more prominent DMK party literati (A.V.P. Asaithambi and Rama Arangannal) scripted one movie each. Fourthly, altogether 11 among the 25 movies were scripted by DMK personalities to project the thoughts and propoganda of the Dravidian Progressive Federation's ideals. Fifthly, T.K. Thanikachalam aka Ilangovan (1913-1971), the trendy-script writer who made a splash in the second half of 1930s, had also contributed his share for three of MGR movies – but his skill was found waning in comparison to DMK's stars Karunanidhi and Kannadasan.



Koondu KiLLi (1954) – Sivaji Ganesan and MGR

T.R.Sundaram (the boss of Modern Theatres), about whom I presented the thoughts of actress Thavamani Devi in Part 10, produced the first whole length Tamil color movie in 1956 and contracted MGR to star in it. It was the third (and the final) Modern Theatres contract for MGR, following Manthiri Kumari (scripted by Karunanidhi) and Sarvadhikari (scripted by Asaithambi). The original story for the 1956 movie was adopted from the well-known Arabian tale, 'Alibaba and the 40 Thieves'. Probably as it was an adoption, Sundaram himself had somewhat a 'dubious' credit as the script writer! According to lyricist-script writer Kannadasan's records, being a Western-trained (in UK) gentleman, Sundaram was not so proficient in Tamil language, but

had passion to appreciate the skills and nuances of poets, lyricists and script writers. The Alibaba movie was produced in Geva color, established in 1948 at a Belgium based company and affiliated to Agfa color of Germany. This Geva color was then promoted as suitable for location shooting, but now when we see the prints almost 50 years later, it appears somewhat 'washed out' and inferior to Kodak Eastman color and Fuji color versions. Nevertheless, MGR's Alibaba movie turned out to be a hit with the Tamil masses, as it was a first time experience they could enjoy the color in totality. This is because illiterate Tamil masses would have watched Hollywood movies produced in color for entertainment. But, being illiterate, majority wouldn't have comprehended the dialogues and songs in English. In India, dialog subtitling into local language was not in vogue.

1950s was the 'Western's greatest decade' in Hollywood movies and according to Edward Buscombe, one of the historians of Westerns movie genre, "Film makers found a new confidence in using the Western to explore social and moral conflicts" of America. Let's look at the name list of 22 movies, their release dates, screen writer(s), and directors details (in sequence) of John Wayne movies between 1950 and 1960. Shared credits for either script writing or direction are indicated by hyphen between the names.

Rio Grande, November 1950, James K. McGuinness, John Ford.

Operation Pacific, January 1951, George Waggner (both script writer and director).

The Bullfighter and the Lady, May 1951, James Edward Grant, Budd Boetticher.

Flying Leathernecks, Aug 1951, James Edward Grant-Beirne Lay Jr., Nicholas Ray.

Big Jim McLain, August 1952, James Edward Grant-Eric Taylor, Edward Ludwig.

The Quiet Man, December 1952, Frank Nugent-Richard Llewellyn, John Ford.

Trouble along the Way, April 1953, Melvill Shavelson-Jack Rose-James Edward Grant (uncredited), Michael Curtiz.

Island in the Sky, September 1953, Ernest K. Gann, William A. Wellman.

Hondo, January 1954, James Edward Grant, John Farrow-John Ford.

The High and the Mighty, July 1954, Ernest K. Gann, William A. Wellman.

The Sea Chase, June 1955, Andrew Greer, John Farrow.

Blood Alley, October 1955, Albert Sidney Fleischman, William A. Wellman.

The Conqueror, March 1956, Oscar Millard, Dick Powell.

The Searchers, May 1956, Frank Nugent, John Ford.

Wings of the Eagles, February 1957, Frank Fenton-William Wister Haines, John Ford.

Jet Pilot, October 1957, Jules Furthman, Joseph von Sternberg.

Legend of the Lost, December 1957, Ben Hecht-Robert Presnell, Henry Hathaway.

The Barbarian and Geisha, October 1958, Charles Grayson-Nigel Balchin-James Edward Grant-Alfred Hayes, John Huston.

Rio Bravo, April 1959, Jules Furthman, Leigh Brackett, Howard Hawks.

The Horse Soldiers, July 1959, John Lee Mahin-Martin Rackin, John Ford.

The Alamo, October 1960, James Edward Grant, John Wayne-John Ford.

North to Alaska, November 1960, John Lee Mahin-Wendell Mayes-Martin Rackin, Henry Hathaway.



John Wayne with his daughter Aissa during the filming of The Alamo (1960)

When studying the 22 John Wayne movies of 1950, it becomes visible, that James Edward Grant was one of favorite screen writers. Other notable features were, (1) for many of Wayne's movies, there were more than one screen writer. (2) Three of the movies were typical Wayne genre – the Westerns (Rio Grande, Hondo, Rio Bravo) and one was a comedic Western (North to Alaska). (3) The canvas for Wayne's historical adventures were broader – 19th century American history (The Searchers, The Alamo), World War I story (Wings of the Eagles), World War II stories and aviation adventures and Cold War action plots. John Wayne also covered Oriental countries such as China (The Conqueror, as Genghis Khan; Blood Alley) and Japan (The Barbarian and the Geisha, as the first US Consul General to Japan – Townsend Harris).

Among the 22 movies, for memorable performances of John Wayne, movie buffs chose Rio Grande, The Searchers, Rio Bravo and The Alamo. Among these four, the plots of two (Rio Grande and Rio Bravo) were Westerns and other two (The Searchers and The Alamo) were derived from 19th century American history. By 1950 (after 22 years of debut!), John Wayne had become the number 1 in box-office popularity poll of the Motion Picture Herald. Similarly, in his autobiography, MGR also chose four of his 1950s movies (namely Marutha Naatu Ilavarasi - 1950, Marma Yogi-1951, Malai Kallan-1954 and Nadodi Mannan-1958) as his signature movies for the following reasons; Marutha Naatu Ilavarasi for showing the producers and movie fans that he was a 'hero property', Marma Yogi for sealing his rank as a hero, Malai Kallan for raising his status as top Tamil hero, and Nadodi Mannan (his own production) for proving to Tamil cine world that he could produce, direct and star as a hero in double roles. MGR's satisfaction in the grand success of his own first production is well deserved, because quite many Tamil cinema heroes of that era lost their capital, burnt their fingers and became paupers by indulging in this vanity. The list includes the singing stars of the 1940s such as M.K. Thiyagarajah Bhagavathar, T.R. Mahalingam, Chittor V. Nagaiah. Probably, only comedian N.S.Krishnan escaped this fate in self-producing his movie –but it was an exception, because he didn't play the hero role!

*Compared to the wide range of story plots in John Wayne's genre of 1950s, MGR's genre was limited to- mostly 'King-Queen stories'. This had to be attributed to the fact, USA being an immigrant country offered more adventurous story plots in 19th century, and in the 20th century it established itself as a technically advanced nation which had to engage in the two World Wars and the subsequent Cold War with the then Soviet Union. India, being a British colony couldn't offer suitable story plots for heroics. Thus MGR had to depend on early Christian period/medieval period/18th century as well as Tamil/Arabian/Persian folk tales for his genre. Three exceptions to the 'King-Queen stories' among the 1950s MGR movies were the plots with contemporary social theme; *Thaiku Pin Thaaram*, *Koondu Kili* (the only movie in which MGR co-starred with Sivaji Ganesan) and *Thai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali* (the original plot from mentor Anna's story). Among these three, the last two were financially unsuccessful with the Tamil audience. A few movie plots had origin from the drama stage, such as *Genova*, *Andaman Kaithi* and *Raja Desingu*.*

*One could also notice that quite a number of MGR's 1950 movies had two heroines (or two respected lead players of that era). Examples include, *Marma Yogi* (Anjali Devi and Madhuri Devi), *Madurai Veeran* (Bhanumathi and Padmini), *Puthumai Pithan* (B.S. Saroja and T.R.Rajakumari), *Mannathi Mannan* (Anjali Devi and Padmini), *Nadodi Mannan* (Bhanumathi and B. Saroja Devi – the new face), *Thai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali* (Jamuna and Raja Sulochana) *Raja Desingu* (Bhanumathi and Padmini). Whether this was by accident or by design to attract additional women fans can be argued. In contrast, John Wayne's 1950 movies do have single heroines (Maureen O'Hara, Lana Turner, Donna Reed, Lauren Bacall, Sophia Loren, Janet Leigh, Patricia Neal, Vera Miles) of that era.*

Revisiting Bharathidasan's satirical poem on Tamil Cinema

[*Bharathidasan lengthy poem on Tamil cinema*](#)

In part 8, I introduced poet Kanaga Subburathinam (1891-1964) aka Bharathidasan's satirical poem on Tamil Cinema, which first appeared in 1936. Initially, I picked up that poem from Aranthai Narayanan's book, 'Story of Tamil cinema'. But I had a nagging suspicion that ending of the poem was rather listless and doesn't have the flourish of Bharathidasan's signature. Then, while digging my personal Tamil book collections, I found the original of that poem from an anthology of Bharathidasan poetry. I'm glad to report that Narayanan's version was incomplete! It provided only mid 27 lines. But the entire poem was 56 lines. Narayanan had clipped the first 24 lines and the final 5 lines of the poem in his book. As such, I provide a scan of the original complete poem nearby. Thus, I had revised my previous English translation (presented in part 8) to fit with the complete original version below.

*To combine both form and the sound
with enhanced light in screen to project picture was an art
perfected by good technicians, Europeans
are promoting was the message which I heard,
"When that day will dawn so that I see
even my nation will make entry into that art form,
when the dark of Tamilnad will cleave to show the moon
to the world, I wonder' I was thinking.*

*A talkie is being shown in my town I heard
I ran; I sat for a night there,
In a tiger living forest, an English girl
spending her youth phase without any man*

*She was enamored with flowers and loitering
casually spending time! A lad came from behind
moved like a cat grapping a rat- and
pressed hand on [her] beautiful back! I saw thrill!*

*The scare in the mind clicked in her eyes
as life being threatened, the body felt a shudder
like lotus when swayed by the wind
its petals shaking, he red lips pouting
asked 'Who are you?' –she talked with eyes;
Give me an answer – she pointed her fingers!
An unblemished scene, I saw natural beauty in it
at the end I realised it was a 'movie'*

*My Tamilians began to take movies;
They did it in one, tens and hundreds.
Not even one had the Tamil style, culture and imprints
They didn't make it that way, life is non-extant!
Not even one raises the Tamilian's spirit!
Not even one was based on higher ideals!
Not even one had a high rated actor!*

Not even one lifts the spirit of down trodden!

Dresses akin to Northerners, and melody of Northerners!

Telugu kirtanas (songs) filled amidst our Tamilians

Slogas in Sanskrit! Speeches in English!

Unpronounceable Hindustani! Obscene dances!

All mixed – and deducting all these junk

Athimper and Ammami are the remaining Tamil words!

Gods of many kinds, false crown, with paper flower garden

Glasses and pearl strings – the attractive accouterment

Lord Shiva appears repeatedly to offer blessings and return!

Homely wives face toils, but overcome them!

There'll be tough song contests with rhythm

Then the drum (mridangam) will engage a solo stint

Love blooms! Similarly troubles come and leave!

Maharishis, temple and lake – these fill the space

Movie moguls – the suckers, had the formula

to suck the blood of poor souls for profit!

When one thinks about the fate of this movie art

*The Capitalists creed spoils it all by deeds
This Saturn of movie business should vanish, I guess!
When many moneybags join hands to be munificent
get rid of selfish thoughts and their petty squirms
mix a little bit of passion in their hearts
to make movies, Tamilnadu – the young peacock
will dance; and the fear of Tamilians will vanish!*

*The final five lines did have the flourish of Bharathidasan's signature.
“When many moneybags join hands to be munificent, get rid of selfish
thoughts and their petty squirms, mix a little bit of passion in their
hearts to make movies – Tamilnadu, the young peacock will dance; and
the fear of Tamilians will vanish!”*

*Bharathidasan's 1936 wish that the 'fear of Tamilians had to vanish'
did find a strong echo 21 years later in an inspirational lyric in
the Mahadevi movie with the 'super-trio combination' (MGR as lip
synching hero, T.M. Soundararajan as the singer and Kannadasan as
the lyricist).*

*'Achcham enpathu madamaiyada – Anjaamai Dravidar Udamaiyada
Aarilum Saavu Noorilum Saavu – Thayagam kaapathu Kadamaiyada'
[Being a Coward is foolish – Being courageous is Dravidian property
Death can be at six or hundred – Protecting the homeland is one's duty]*

Selling Sincerity

It took another 30 years, for only Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam led by Prabhakaran, to take the inspirational lines of Mahadevi movie seriously and apply them in life at Sri Lanka! So many inspirational Tamil songs were generated by the 'super trio combination', led by MGR. Why? – he sincerely believed that movie is a simple medium to preach something of worth to one's life. In this issue, John Wayne also shared the same belief. Wayne had pronounced that an actor 'being part of a bigger world than Hollywood'. It is because of such a thought, Wayne played a lead role in the formation of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals.

What John Wayne said of himself, for why he became the number 1 popular Hollywood star in the 1950s was this. "I suppose my best attribute if you want to call it that, is sincerity. I can sell sincerity because that's the way I am. I can't be insincere or phony. I can't say a petty thing and make it sound right." The same 'selling sincerity' idea applies to MGR's career in Tamil movies as well as politics. He had designed his career path to sell sincerity to the Tamil masses by his songs and acts as a hero who used his fist daringly. Quite a number of MGR's detractors (especially his friends turned foes like Karunanidhi and Kannadasan) and film snobs (for example, his biographer M.S.S. Pandian) press a case that MGR's sincerity to masses was phony.

“என் தமிழர் படமெடுக்க ஆரம்பஞ் செய்தார்;
 எடுத்தார்கள் ஒன்றிரண்டு பத்து நூறாக!
 ஒன்றேனும் தமிழர் நடையுடை பாவனைகள்
 உள்ளது வாய் அமைக்கவில்லை, உயிர் உள்ளதில்லை!
 ஒன்றேனும் தமிழருமை உணர்த்துவதா யில்லை!!
 ஒன்றேனும் உயர்நோக்கம் அமைந்ததுவா யில்லை!
 ஒன்றேனும் உயர் நடிகர் வாய்ந்ததுவா யில்லை!
 ஒன்றேனும் வீழ்ந்தவரை எழுப்புவதா யில்லை!
 வடநாட்டார் போன்ற உடை, வட நாட்டார் மெட்டு!
 மாத்தமிழர் நடுவினிலே தெலுங்கு கீர்த் தனங்கள்!
 வடமொழியில் ஸ்லோகங்கள்! ஆங்கில ப்ரசங்கம்!
 வாய்க்கு வரா இந்துஸ்தான்! ஆபாச நடனம்!
 அடையும் இவை அத்தனையும் கழித்துப் பார்க்குங்கால்,
 அத்திம்பேர் அம்மாமி எனுந் தமிழ்தான் மீதம்!
 கடவுளர்கள், அட்டை முடி, காகிதப் பூஞ்சோலை,
 கண்ணாடி முத்துவடம் கண்கொள்ளாக் காட்சி!
 பரமசிவன் அருள்புரிய வந்து வந்து போவார்!
 பதிவிரதைக் கின்னல் வரும் பழையபடி தீரும்!
 சிரமமொடு தாளமெண்ணிப் போட்டியிலே பாட்டுச்
 சிலபாடி மிருதங்கம் ஆவர்த்தம் தந்து
 வரும் காதல்! அவ்விதமே துன்பம் வரும் போகும்!
 மகரிஷிகள் கோயில் குளம் - இவைகள் சீதாசாரம்.
 இரக்கமற்ற பட முதலாளிக் கெல்லாம் இதனால்
 ஏழைகளின் ரத்தத்தை உறிஞ்சியது லாபம்!
 படக்கலைதான் வாராதா என நினைத்த நெஞ்சம்
 பாழ்படுத்தும் முதலாளி வர்க்கத்தின் செயலால்
 படக்கலையாம் சனிமொழிந்தால் போதுமென எண்ணும்!”

Bharathidasan 1936 poem on Tamil cinema

Ravindar. MGR's assistant, had recorded the following reminiscence he had heard from his boss, relating to an event which happened in 1972. MGR had visited Calcutta to receive the Bharath award offered by the Central government.

“Calcutta is well known for rasgulla; not now, forever. [Rasgulla is a sweet, syrupy ball dumbling, served as a dessert.] My brother and I went to Calcutta in 1936 for the shooting of Maya Machindra movie. Do you know, what was my salary then? Two hundred (rupees). For a month, we ate what was fed by them and it was a jail experience. In those days, there were no studios in Madras.

I loved eating sweets then. I wished to eat rasgulla. One dumpling costs four anna. No money! Then, server Kuldeep who was appointed for our meals fulfilled my pleasure. After I received the award and came out, there was much crowd, shouting ‘Long live MGR’. That Kuldeep whom I saw 40 years earlier, was also standing at a side in the hotel crowd, with a garland. I had noticed him.

Then, my tongue was sweetened by the rasgulla he had offered me. Now, my heart was sweetened by seeing him. He was rather surprised to see the difference in me – what he saw then, what he sees now. I hugged him and brought him to the room. Then, he was a bachelor. Now, he said he had two grandchildren. I felt pity for him and offered something. He rejected my offer, and told that this meeting itself was heart filling. Somehow, he did accept what I offered subsequently.”

Thus, one could note that from roughly 60 rupees per month for his first movie, MGR’s earning had increased to 200 rupees per month for his fifth movie. But still, available opportunities were scarce. Even the role for which he chosen in the Maya Machindra, came his way because the actor M.G. Nadaraja Pillai who was originally contracted to play that role had died!

To his interviewer Copper Cochin, MGR had stated in 1981, “I was attracted by the ‘prohibition’ movement of Gandhiji and untouchability, equality of castes and I was enrolled in Congress movement at 13 years of age. During 1934-35, I had met N.S.Krishnan, later known as ‘Kalaivanar’, the famous film and stage comedian and social reformer who followed the ideals of Periyar [E.V. Ramasamy Naicker]. Through him I had the privilege of meeting such great people as P.

Jeevanantham. It was said that Jeevanantham – who was popularly known as ‘Jeeva’ went underground often, to escape from the legal clutches of the British. Kalaivanar advised me to read Periyar’s Kudiarasu [literal translation, ‘People’s Rule’] which was a weekly then. I read the magazines written and edited by Periyar E.V.R. Hence I have grown with all these policies and principles.”

Copper Cochin had recorded what he heard from MGR as follows: “When the chances of getting cinema roles were becoming bleak he [MGR] learnt that young people who possess horse-riding training and who can converse in English were being recruited for the army. He decided to join the army. To qualify for this, he learnt horse riding and the English language through a teacher. Soon he acquired a good knowledge of spoken English with sufficient grammar, including active and passive voice. When the time came, MGR gave up the idea of joining the army because his chest measurements did not quite come upto the required standard! This proved to be his ‘lucky break’, for at this point Nandalal Jaswanthalal, the famous director and editor offered him his first starring role at the salary of Rupees 350 per month! ‘Halfway through the shooting however, the film folded and I was out of work again’, said MGR ruefully.

This particular movie Chaaya (1941) for which MGR was chosen to play the hero role joined the long list of MGR movies which were announced to begin, but failed to be completed for various number of reasons. The promotional announcement indicated that it would appear as the Pakshiraja banner. Thirteen years later, another movie with the title Malai Kallan (1954, Mountain Thief) under the same Pakshiraja banner did create history, with MGR as the hero. At that time, the monthly pay for a beginner at army was only around 125 rupees. One wonders, if he was lucky to be selected to serve the Indian army as a foot soldier, at best his talents for showmanship in movies and politics might have been lost in the next decades, or at worst he might have lost his life during India’s perennial wars with Pakistan. Thus, his non-selection to

Indian army was a blessing to many who later benefitted by his patronage.

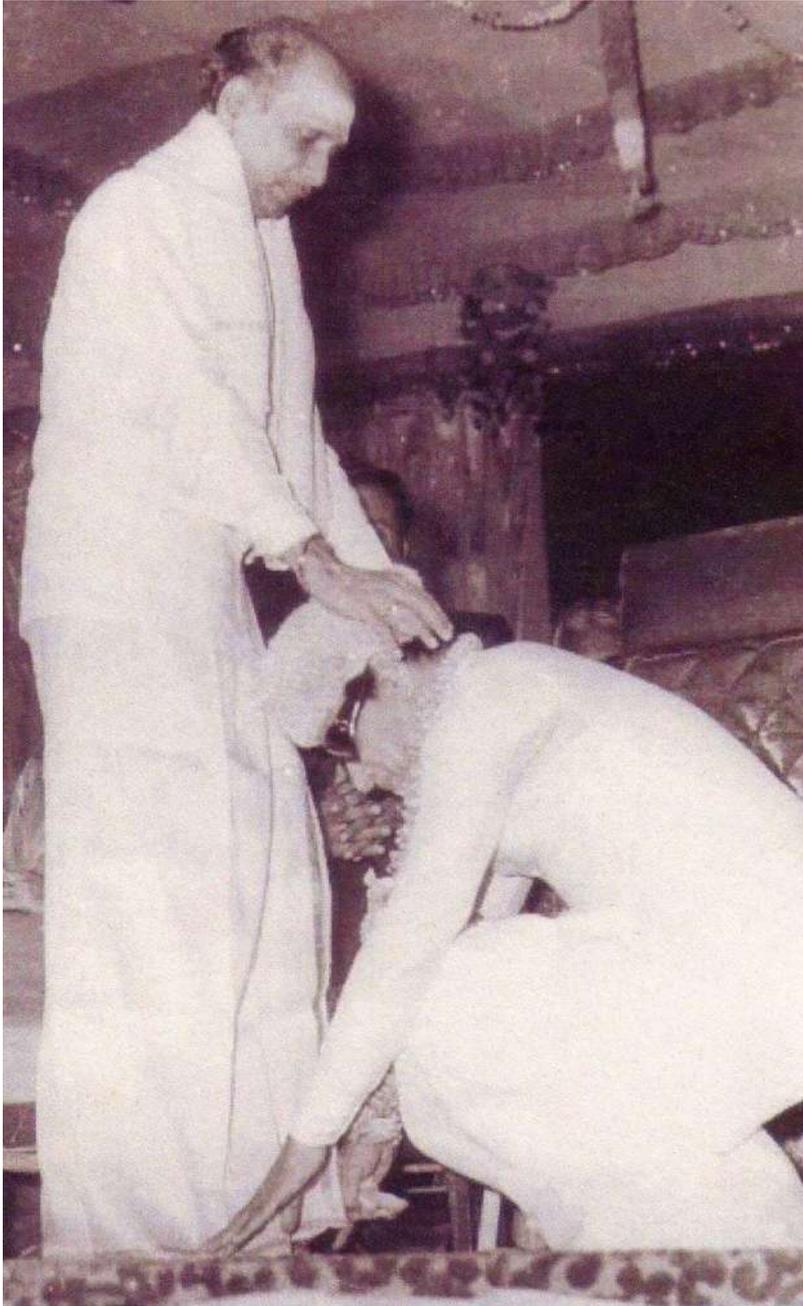
One Dilemma of Biographers

Few biographers begin the biography of their subjects, immediately from the date of birth. Here are some examples:

Ernest Jones began his ‘Sigmund Freud: Life and Work (vol.1, 1953) with, “Sigmund Freud was born at 6:30 pm on the six of May, 1856, at 117, Schlossergasse, Frieberg, in Moravia, and died on the twenty third of September, 1939, at 20, Maresfield Gardens, London.”

M. Vythilingam, opened his ‘The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan (vol.1, 1971), with the following sentence: “Ramanathan was born on 16th April 1851 at what is known today as Sea Street, Colombo in the stately home of his illustrious grandfather Gate Mudaliyar Arumuganathapillai Coomaraswamy, the first occupant of the Tamil seat in the Legislative Council, when it was newly constituted under the British in 1833”.

MGR greeting M.K. Radha in a public function



Martin Green's opening sentence of his 'Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution' (1993) was, "Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in a three-story house in Porbandar: which is a town on the Arabian Sea Coast of India, north of Bombay, in the province of Gujarat."

Brenda Maddox began her, 'Rosalind Franklin – the dark lady of DNA' (2002) with, "The family into which Rosalind Elsie Franklin was born on 25 July 1920, stood high in Anglo-Jewry."

But, not all biographers have such a luxury in beginning their biographies of subjects. Such a beginning is possible, if a validated birth certificate exists for the biographical subject. What if, such a document is unavailable for any reason, and the conditions of birth are shrouded in mystery? Not only the date of birth, but even the location of birth couldn't be clearly deciphered for many legendary individuals, due to family circumstances of temporary residence and migration.

A good example I located among the biographies I had read was that of 'Saint Peter' (1994), by Michael Grant. He began his first chapter entitled 'The Problems of Research' with three sentences as follows: "Peter is one of the central figures of the Christian religion and also, inevitably, a key figure of the entire world of today, with which, whether people are aware of the fact or not, that religion is inextricably fused. And yet he remains a shadowy, legendary personage. Some declare, indeed, that it is impossible to recover any true picture of him and see what he was really like."

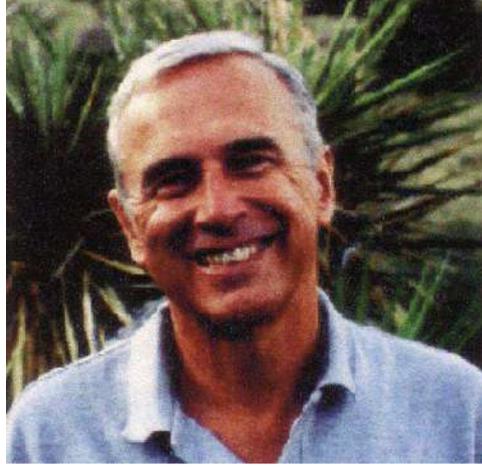
At least, we have a chronological excuse that Saint Peter lived almost 2,000 years ago. So, we don't know exactly when and where he was born. But historians had deduced that Peter was probably executed in Rome, between the years AD 64 and 68. For MGR, who lived amongst us until 26 years ago, we are not sure when and where (I mean, the exact location) he was born! Of course, he himself had acknowledged that he was born in Ceylon. Some reports identify the location as either Kandy or Nawalapitiya. But, we know certainly that MGR had a natural death on December 24, 1987 in Chennai. As such, I refrained from beginning the first part of this biography with information about his birth date. But, I cannot let this inconvenience pass forever. I was determined to settle tentatively, MGR's date (or at least) year of birth, from circumstantial evidence.

Help from Two Specialists

After I began writing this 'MGR Remembered' series, I was fortunate to contact two specialists via emails. One was Emeritus Professor Robert Hardgrave Jr. (born 1939). He was one of the pioneer American academics who focused his attention on the Tamil Nadu politics of 1960s, and is considered as an authority on DMK of Anna period and Nadar caste. The other one was R. Kannan (born 1962), a biographer of C.N. Annadurai, the leader of DMK. He is from Chennai. In fact, Kannan is also currently writing a biography on MGR. When Kannan contacted me after reading this MGR series, rather than treating Kannan as a rival for my interests, I was happy to share whatever I had collected on MGR with him, and he also had reciprocated equally. One of the gifts I received from Kannan, was a photocopy of MGR's published autobiography 'Naan Yen Piranthaen' (2003). I had valued this gift from Kannan, because for the past 40 years, it had remained as one of my elusive needs. Having received this vital document, I set upon to settle the doubts on MGR's year of birth.

Here is what, Prof. Hardgrave had written about MGR's early years, in 1979. "M. Gopala Ramachandran is a Malayalee, born in Kandy, Ceylon, where his father was the principal of a college. His official birth date is January 17, 1917 – although it is widely believed that he is really five years older. When MGR was three years old his father died, and the family moved to Tamil Nadu. Poverty-stricken, his two sisters and a brother died. At the age of six, MGR entered 'the Madurai Original Boys Company', a dramatic troupe."

Prof. Hardgrave had given me permission to cite the email exchanges he had with me, on MGR-related queries. I provide four of the recent email exchanges which I had with Prof. Hardgrave.



Prof. Emeritus Robert Hardgrave Jr.

Dear Prof. Hardgrave,

Today, I received the reprints and photocopies of your 5 publications on MGR-DMK-Tamil movies. I'm so delighted. Thank you very much for your kindness. In 1970s, your name was the first among American scholars I recognized for your studies on Nadars. I had been wondering since then, what made you interested in researching on Tamilians. I cannot believe that now, I'm corresponding with you via email.

I recognize that you had interviewed MGR in December 1969. Now that he had died for 25 years, may I know some of your impressions about him. For example, (1) Did both of you talk in Tamil, or in English? (2) If you talked in English, was he able to comprehend your questions properly? (3) You mention that though his official birth date is given in 1917, it was recognized that he was born 5 years older. Did you check with him directly, about his birth year? (4) After your publications were printed, did you send these to him, and what were his reactions? – Did he bother to express any? (5) Did you take any photo with him? Sorry for troubling you with these questions. I was lucky, only to shake his hand for a second in 1981 at Madurai. That's my brief interaction with him. Hence, these questions to you. Best regards.

Sachi

Sept. 28, 2013: from Robert Hardgrave Jr.

I had become interested in India when an undergraduate, and for a Senior Honors Thesis, I selected a political party—the DMK—I had read about but for which there were not scholarly articles. I was curious, and I was able to my thesis from microfilm sources of “The Hindu” and other Tamilnadu newspapers. It was limited, but it got me interested in Tamil politics, and I was able to get a Rotary International Scholarship to spend a year in India, 1960-61, before I started my graduate studies for my M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. I divided my stay in India between Madras and New Delhi. I decided to give some focus to my time in India by extending my study of the DMK—and since no one had studied it before, I was welcomed by party leaders. I met all of the leaders, but it was E.V.K. Sampath (at that time, the DMK’s only Member of Parliament, and a nephew of Periyar) who became my friend and mentor. At that time, MGR was more focused on film than on political life—but his films, of course, had a DMK theme.

My M.A. thesis at the University of Chicago was “The Dravidian Movement,” drawing on all the interviews I had conducted with DMK leaders and others when I had been in India, as well as a huge number of DMK and DK publications I collected. The thesis was published as a book in 1965.

I studied Tamil at the University of Chicago and used it in my Ph.D. dissertation research on the Nadars. My next research project, in 1969-70, took me back to Tamil Nadu and to my continuing interest in the DMK for a study of politics and the Tamil film. I had met Sivaji Ganesan earlier, and I spent a good bit of time with him and got to know him quite well. While I talked with many of the people associated with MGR and had special screenings for me at studios of old MGR films, I interviewed him only once. I attended meetings where he was present, but I really talked with him on one (maybe two) occasion. He was not really comfortable speaking English, but as I recall, most of our conversation was in English—perhaps with some Tamil. I do not recall any discussion of his birth year, but he was known to be very sensitive about his age—especially as he still played romantic roles where he was supposed to be a young man pursuing his love interest. I wish I had

gotten a photo of me with MGR. That would be a treasured memento. There are so many stories of MGR helping people, but I know of one family (with whom I remain close friends) that he helped greatly when they faced a financial crisis. They remain forever grateful for his generosity.

Several years ago, when Theodore Baskaran was director of the Raja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai, I gave copies of all my film project interviews and also my collection of photos and film posters, and film-related pamphlets, publications, etc. to library. I wish you all the best on your project. Yours, Bob

Dear Prof. Hardgrave,

Thanks a lot for responding to my questions. May I ask your permission to quote the contents that you have stated, in my 'MGR Remembered' series. In my opinion, provided details seem to hurt no living individuals. You can glance at my latest chapter on this series, part 11 by the link provided below.

sangam.org/mgr-remembered-part-11/

Best regards.

Sachi

Oct. 1, 2013: from Robert Hardgrave Jr.

You may quote me. Thank you for including the URL for the Ilankai Tamil Sangam site and your "MGR Remembered." It is very interesting, and I will share it with a few people who I know will be interested. All the best, Bob.

P.U. Chinnappa (1916-1951)

The entry on MGR in the Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema (1999), while indicating the birth and death years as 1917-87 next to his name, carries an erroneous indication in the second sentence: "Born in Kandy, Sri

Lanka (possibly in 1912)”. It is my opinion that the birth years of other well-known Tamil movie stars such as Sivaji Ganesan, N.S. Krishnan and P.U. Chinnappa are erroneous in this encyclopedia. Such errors reflect badly on the fact-checking skills of Tamil film historians (Randor Guy, M.S.S. Pandian, S. Theodore Baskaran, Preetham Chakravarthy and M. Ravikumar) who had acted as consultants for this encyclopedia. Not only this. Even some other Tamil movie artistes who had received entries in this encyclopedia are devoid of information about their birth years. Due allowance should be made that film industry personnel, beginning from starlets and heroines, are notorious for hiding such vital information from snooping reporters.

*Previously I have written an essay on ‘Anna, Annachi, Annathe’ on the endearing kinship word in Tamil, as a 80th birth anniversary tribute to singer Sirkazhi Govindarajan. In it, I also included the variant term ‘Anne’ (in Tamilnadu) or ‘Annai’ (in Eelam). Literally, the word means elder brother. So, I checked in MGR’s autobiography to count the number of individuals for whom MGR had used this special kinship term among his drama-cinema circles. The logic was, he couldn’t have used this term for one who was born in the same year as he was, or to anyone who is younger to him. If I could establish clearly, the year of birth of **at least one individual** for whom MGR had addressed as ‘Annan’ or ‘Anne’, then he would have been chronologically junior to him.*

Here is the list of 14 individuals MGR had used ‘Anne’; some are well known, but others are not so well known. Most of them were his mentors and actors in stage and/or cinema. Unfortunately, I don’t know the exact year of birth of all these 14 individuals. But, the birth years of few among the well-known personalities have been helpful.

Madras Kandaswami Radha (1910-1985), mentor and actor

Mannarkudi G. Nadaraja Pillai, actor

Kali N. Ratnam, mentor and comedian actor

T.R. Ragunath (1912-1990), director and younger brother of Raja Chandrasekhar, director.

Puthukoddai Ulaganathan Chinnappa (1916-1951), mentor and actor

Nagarkoil Sudalaimuthu Krishnan (1908-1957), mentor and comedian actor

Ramadas, makeup man

K.P. Kesavan, mentor and actor

K.P. Kamatchi, actor and lyricist

Sama Naidu, friend

T.K. Shanmugam (1912-1973), actor

Madras Rajagopalan Radha (1907-1979), actor

Sunthararaju, scene 'set up' man in dramas

K.K. Perumal, actor

Of the five mentors of MGR listed above, who appear prominently in his autobiography, I'm not sure about the birth years of Kali N. Ratnam and K.P. Kesavan. But, the birth years of other three mentors (namely, M.K. Radha, N.S. Krishnan and P.U. Chinnappa) are certain.

P.U. Chinnappa stamp cover 2003 July 21

A heart-warming photo exists of an aged MGR (in his fur cap and sun glass) greeting his older mentor M.K. Radha (whose father Madras Kandaswami Mudaliar was the provider for young MGR and his elder brother Chakrapani as a drama company proprietor) by bending his knees to touch the feet of his mentor, in a public function. Charismatic MGR was a stickler for decorum and seniority. His assistant K. Ravindar had recorded in his memoir that MGR would be irritated with

those juniors (actors or assistant directors) who failed to maintain proper decorum, like crossing one's legs while seated when a senior passes by. Those who commit such blunders would be instantly fired from their jobs! Such a personality like MGR, bending his knees to touch the feet of an older M.K. Radha tells something about the respect he had for his mentor.

Raja Chandrasekhar (1904-1971) was the director for a few of early MGR movies, when MGR played bit parts. Here is what MGR had written about the magnanimity of M.K. Radha (MKR) in his autobiography.

“Mr. MKR took me to Mr. Sekhar. Dakshayagnam was about to be produced. [It was MGR's third movie, released in 1938]. He took me to recommend me for a spot in that movie. Director Sekhar asked: ‘Why Radha? Can Ramachandran act?’

Mr. M.K. Radha Annan replied: ‘Why, you are asking like that? What do you think about me?’

For this response, Mr. Sekhar retorted, ‘When I'm asking about him, you are telling about yourself.’

MKR smiled and responded, ‘What answer you provide about me, will be the same answer I give about Ramachandran.’ MKR didn't stop there. ‘I have luck. So I act as hero. Ramachandran is down on luck. So, he is looking for opportunities. The difference between us is this. There is no other difference, in acting or other capabilities between us.’

This is how, M.K. Radha Annan responded, to solicit a chance for me. When I'm writing this, I cry. I'm not sure whether you cry or not. About my capabilities, none haven't talked like this before; or even later, as of now. Friends do put me down, but to find me an opportunity, the kind M.K. Radha Annan exaggerated about my talent so much then. I've never come across any other actor like him.”

Akin to M.K. Radha, MGR also formed a solid mentor-protégé link with P.U. Chinnappa. His autobiography provides many episodes about his interaction with P.U. Chinnappa as well. Especially of interest to me was the birth year of P.U. Chinnappa, about whom I had written in previous parts. I did write, it was the untimely death of Chinnappa in 1951, which opened up MGR's path for hero roles in Tamil cinema. Ten years ago, a stamp was released for Chinnappa in India, as one of the pioneers of Indian film industry. In it, it is recorded that his birth is recorded as 1916 May 5. Thus, by deduction, MGR should have been born after 1916, to address him as 'Anne'. Therefore, it is safe and sound to infer that MGR was indeed born in 1917. When I wrote a 82nd birthday tribute to MGR in 1992 in the Tamil Nation (print edition), I wrote the following:

“Many have ridiculed the uncertainty of his birth date, though MGR had used 17 January 1917 in his personal documents. One should sympathize with MGR on this matter because he was born to an Indian immigrant family in a tea plantation in Ceylon, which was then under British colonial rule. Way back in 1917, the health care facilities available for the plantation workers were atrocious, leave alone the requirements related to birth registration. That he survived into adulthood itself was an achievement.”

*Now, I feel relieved that having read MGR's complete autobiography, by deductive inference, I can safely assume that 1917 as his birth year **cannot be in error.***

It is interesting to note that in his autobiography, MGR addressed his own elder brother Chakrapani (1911-1986), as 'Yetan', and not as 'Annan'. Wherever he mentions his brother, he used another honorific Tamil word for elder brother, 'thamayanar'. As Chakrapani was born to Gopala Menon and Satyabhama in 1911, at Vadavanur, Kerala state, it can be assumed that MGR's parents immigrated to Ceylon, only after Chakrapani's birth – probably tempted by suitable job opportunities available then for Gopala Menon. We don't have information on which year MGR's parents moved to Ceylon. In the last chapter (No. 134) of

his published autobiography, MGR does mention that he was born in Ceylon, and was brought up in Tamilnadu. It is unfortunate that his autobiography was abruptly abandoned (akin to quite a number of his movie projects), immediately after his expulsion from the DMK party in October 1972.

How can one answer Robert Hardgrave's comment in his 1979 paper that "His [MGR's] official birth date is January 17, 1917 – although it is widely believed that he is really five years older." Until he reached 50 in 1967, MGR was a virile, action hero. He protected his trim physique by performing rigorous exercises. Only after he received gunshot wounds from his senior actor M.R. Radha in 1967, MGR appears to have aged noticeably. Yet, he was still in demand by the producers and film distributors to play hero role. Maybe, like any other movie industry in other countries, the 'industrial air' is bound to circulate rumors spread by rivals who were focused in tripping the glamor of a popular hero. MGR was no exception. He did have powerful rivals in cinema, politics and print media who spread incorrect facts for profit.

Think of a situation that if MGR was indeed five years older, then he should have been born around 1912, as indicated in the Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema. This would make MGR older than P.U. Chinnappa, whose birth year is certified as 1916. If MGR addressed Chinnappa as 'Anne', then Chinnappa should have been born before 1912! This in turn would make the fact provided in the Indian stamp released in honor of Chinnappa as erroneous.

There is another supporting statement from MGR in his autobiography. He does mention, "When I entered cinema, I was around sixteen or seventeen. Even then I had a well-proportioned body build." (chapter 10, p. 136). Suppose MGR was born in 1912, then accordingly, he would have entered cinema either in 1928 or 1929. This couldn't be true. This is because, the first Tamil-Telugu bilingual talkie movie Kalidas was released only in October 31, 1931. And MGR would have spent over six years in cinema, before the release of his debut movie in 1936.

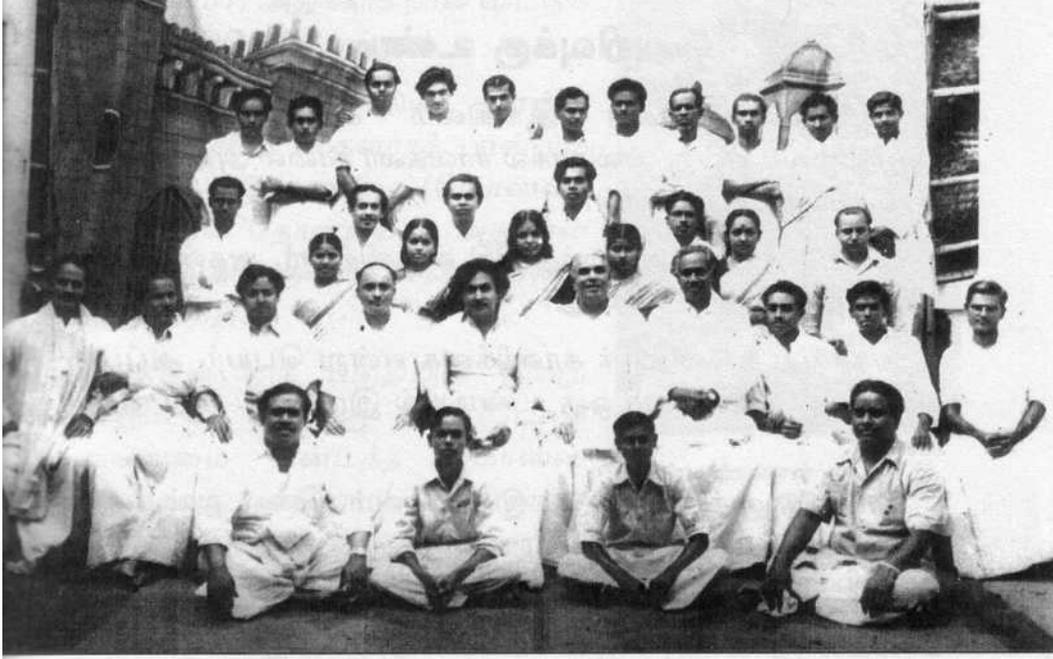
Climax to Stage Drama Career



MGR bending down in front of director V. Shantaram

Thoughts of Three Readers

I provide the thoughts of three readers of this series, and my responses to them. In an email that I received on Nov.8, a reader Manickam Miller from Chennai wrote the following:



தனது நாடகக் குழுவினருடன் எம்.ஜி.ஆர். நாற்காலியில் அமர்ந்திருப்பவர்கள்
(இ.வ.) மூன்றாவதாக எம்.கே.முஸ்தபா, ஐந்தாவதாக எம்.ஜி.ஆர்.,
ஆறாவதாக எம்.ஜி.சக்ரபாணி, எட்டாவதாக கே.ரவீந்தர்,
ஒன்பதாவதாக ஆர்.எம்.வீரப்பன் ஆகியோர்.

MGR drama troupe members (circa mid 1950s)

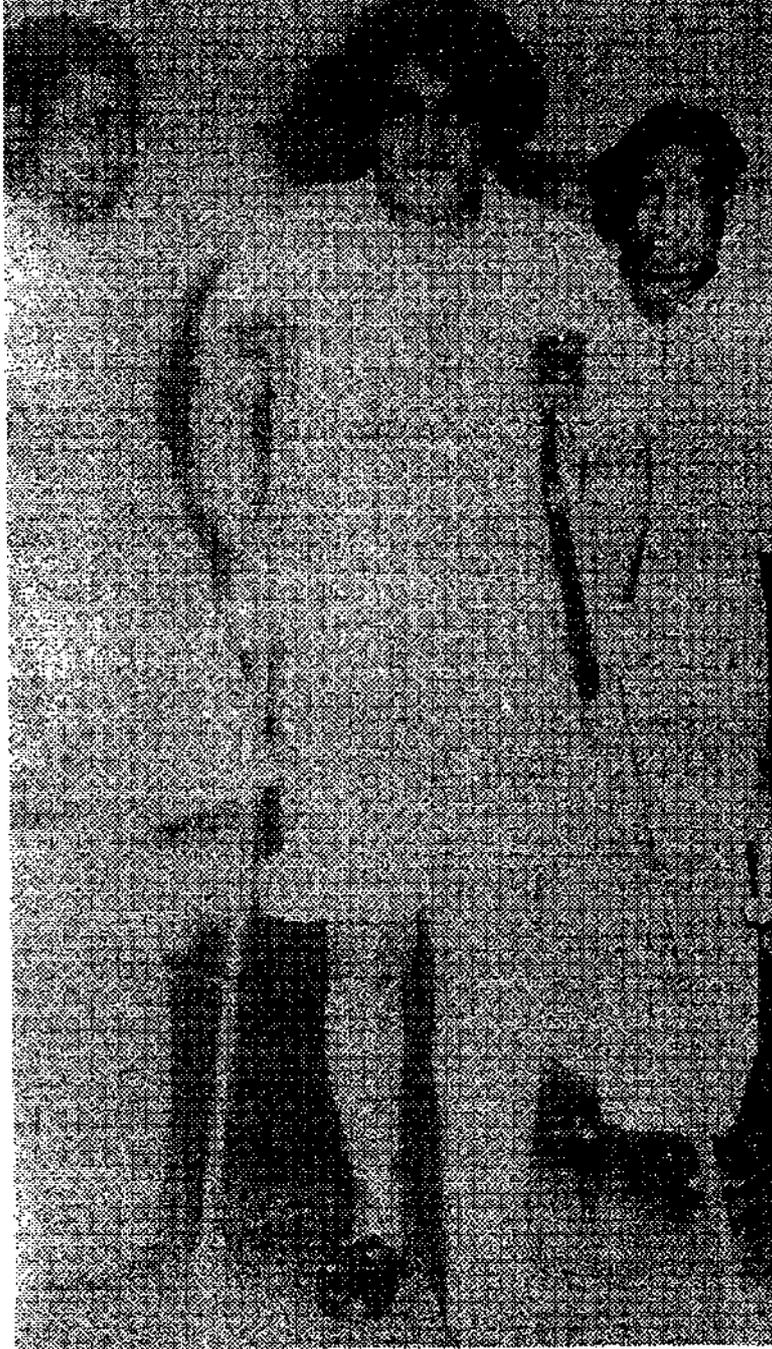
“Your details and non-traditional perception of things interested me. I have a lot of interest in Tamil cinema and want to work on setting up a Tamil cinema archives a la Margaret Herrick Library.

I enjoy MGR Remembered thoroughly because it talks about him as an earthly mortal with heavenly qualities. Almost all the writers who had written about MGR so far made him either a God or a Satan. The wonderful life of MGR is still not explored in the right perspective and it is a duty to take him to the next generation. Your writing is a good sign. Thanks.”

In a subsequent email of Nov.13th, the same reader wrote, “And MGR touching the feet of somebody in public is very rare. So far there are only two such instances have been known or recorded. One is M.K. Radha which you have mentioned, and another is director V. Shantaram.”

'Boss'. My response to Kannan's thought were in the email I sent to him on Nov. 11th. Relevant excerpts were,

"I do agree your point that kinship term 'Annan/Anne' could be used to a chronologically younger guy, based on social standing. There is one instance of that, in MGR's autobiography. MGR mentions at one location that N.S.Krishnan (NSK) used to call M.K.Radha (MKR), as 'Annan', though chronologically NSK was few years senior to MKR. While reading MGR's autobiographies, I also noticed another point. He doesn't address other chronologically elder artistes to him (such as T.S. Balaiah, S.V. Sahasranamam and Krishnan of Krishnan-Panju director duo) as 'Anne'. May be, he was not so close to them, like the 14, I had identified in part 12."



கால்முறிவுக்குப் பின்...

MGR with his left leg in cast (1959)

The third reader Arul Pandian from California wrote the following in his email of Dec.3rd: "I read your latest MGR article. Even though you have convincingly proved that 1917 is his birth year, it is hard for me to

accept that he died at a relatively young age of 70 compared to the still living corpse Karunanidhi.” To this reader, my response was as follows,

“Regarding MGR’s death at age 70, one cannot ignore the fact that entertainers (actors, singers, and musicians) overall have a relatively shorter life span, because of the risks (personal and professional) they take in their careers and also for the energy they dissipate for their performances. So, it’s apt that MGR and Sivaji Ganesan had a relatively short life span. I’m also amazed to see quite a number of my favorite actors and singers (such as T.S. Balaiah, S.V. Subbiah, T.R. Mahalingam, Sirkazhi Govindarajan) died in their 50s or after barely reaching 60.”

The episode of MGR bending in front of director V. Shantaram

MGR’s writing assistant Ravindar (aka Kaja Muhaideen) had recorded this episode for posterity. I provide a translation below as well as that particular photo nearby.

“After MGR became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, he invited Shantaram for a special function and honored him. For that function, he presented Shantaram with a chain made of nine sovereigns. This is because Shantaram had previously produced an unusual movie titled, ‘Navrang’.[Navam (in Sanskrit) = nine]

When it was handed to Shantaram, he had requested MGR to garland him with it. During that action, the chain had accidentally fell down. When both bent down to pick it, MGR stopped Shantaram and he himself picked the fallen chain that had landed in front of Shantaram’s legs. This particular scene was snapped by some photographers, and the next day the caption for that photo appeared as, MGR received blessing from Shantaram by bending down. After reading this report, MGR commented, ‘Even if I received such blessing, I’d be more than happy. There is no shame in receiving such blessing from elders who are above us. It shows that humility is a wonderful trait to possess.’

When one checks that particular photo, we notice that in the dais, to the left of Shantaram, Morarji Desai (then the prime minister) and M. Karunanidhi were seated. Even though, he was the chief minister, MGR had invited and accommodated Karunanidhi (who was then the Leader of the Opposition of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly) for that particular function.

One Difference between John Wayne and MGR



Grace Kelly and Jimmy Stewart in 'Rear Window' (1954)

In Parts 10 and 11 of this series, I had compared the movie careers of MGR and John Wayne. One vital difference between their careers deserves notice. While MGR had a strong background in stage drama before his entry into movies, John Wayne lacked such a background. John Wayne was unique for his generation, in not having such a stage background, whereas other leading Hollywood heroes such as Spencer Tracy, Anthony Quinn, Kirk Douglas, Jason Robards Jr.,

James Stewart, Henry Fonda and Marlon Brando had it.

MGR had a total of nearly 18 years (from ~1924 to 1936 and from ~1953 to 1959) of stage experience, between the ages 7 to 42. Though he entered movie industry in 1936 and elevated his career from a bit player to the hero rank in 1947, once he established himself as a hero, he set up his own drama troupe. This was a fashion of those times. Many of his seniors and contemporaries in the Tamil movies did manage drama troupes. These include, N.S. Krishnan, S.V. Sahasranamam (both MGR's seniors) as well as K.R. Ramasamy, Sivaji Ganesan, S.S. Rajendran, R.S. Manohar and K.A. Thangavelu. Many reasons can be cited for movie actors managing their own drama troupes, of which vanity maybe one. Some like Manohar (though playing the villain role in movies) could act as a hero his own drama production and satisfy their ego and gain fame with the fans. Another reason could be, to feel the pulse and sentiments of the patronizing common folks directly without intermediaries and formulating viable movie plots of the day. An additional reason could be to identify and promote new talents for movies. One such surprising 'find' by MGR was comedian Ceiyur Krishna Gundu Rao (aka C.K. Nagesh), though he was not a member of MGR drama troupe. This had been acknowledged by Nagesh himself, in his autobiography.

A scan of MGR's autobiographical memoirs reveals that majority of its 134 chapters were related to MGR's life time experience in stage drama in Tamilnadu of 1920s and 1930s. In a couple of instances, he touches the 1940s (before he became a movie hero in 1947), such as suggesting revision to a script on warrior king Sivaji penned by his later mentor Anna. In 1950s, MGR had formed his own drama troupe. Towards this focus, he had hired two script writers (namely K. Ravindar and Vidwan V. Lakshmanan in 1953 and 1954). But excluding a few chapters and a couple of names, MGR hardly mentions about the composition of his drama troupe in his autobiographical memoirs. Only exception: a career threatening injury that he suffered at the staging of his drama in 1959.

In his memoirs, Ravindar had included a couple of photos (MGR drama troupe members and the bill for 1953 announcement of the troupe drama 'Idintha Koyil' (Demolished Temple). These I

provide here, in scans. The bill indicates the roster of actors and specifically mentions that MGR will appear in stage 'for the first time!' after his hero stints in movies, Manthirikumari, Sarvadhikari, Naam, Genoa and Marma Yogi. Some actors listed, apart from MGR had already gained a footing in movies, such as MGR's elder sibling M.G. Chakrapani, K.A. Thangavelu (comedian), M.K. Mustapha and Muthukoothan (a lyricist).

A head count of the MGR drama troupe photo indicates 36 individuals, including five women. MGR and his elder sibling were seated in (bench or chair) the first row in the middle, 5th and 6th respectively from the left. Relative to his brother, MGR had noticeable black scalp hair, while his brother had a thinning whitish hair. Script writer Ravindar is seated 8th from the left, and R.M.Veerappan (later to become another trusted MGR hand in movies and politics) is seated 9th from the left.

Snippets of Stage Drama Career in his Autobiographical Memoirs

I provide below translations of MGR's recording of his stage experiences, in translation. In chapter 48, under the caption 'Internal and External', he wrote,

"Nearly 25 years ago [note by Sachi: probably around 1946], I got an opportunity to act in a drama 'Karppin Vetri' (Victory for Chastity), scripted by Mr. R. Venkatasalam. The character I played was that of a young man who promoted an idea that was not then accepted by the society. He was of good character; not under the influence of any negative individuals; he himself was without any bad habits. He loved a woman; both were bound by feelings, sentiments and policy. He promoted the idea that 'tying the thaali (holy knot) is superstitious; having a life contract is rational'. Those sentiments were accepted by his bride too. But when I acted that character in front of many folks at

the stage, as scripted by the playwright, what I received was only ridicule, anger and resentment.

This was the sentiments of that period. Folks who rejected the thought and phrase 'life contract' then, were the same who accepted when such life contracts and registered marriages were held later under the guidance of leaders."

In chapter 55, under the caption 'Mental Struggle', MGR had described his premonition about the accident that he would face on June 16, 1959. Here is the translation, of this particular chapter.

"I established the 'MGR Drama Troupe' and conducted it for a few years. As I plan to describe my experiences received in such a venture later, I mention here only the relevant episode.

It was about the drama to be staged in Sirkazhi. In previous days, the same drama was staged in Peravoorani and ThirukaddupaLLi. As usual I woke in the morning – but on that particular day I was in disturbed mind and for a long time I was seated in by bedding. Friends came to inquire. If there was anything special, then I could answer them. Only, when pal Thirupathi asked me separately, I told him my concern. 'My mind is troubled. I don't know why. I guess, a big accident is about to happen. To whom? How? Where? This I don't know.' He comforted me, 'As you were acting in a conflict-concerned role, you might have slept with those thoughts. That's why you are troubled like this.'

'I'm not dreaming; I felt this, while I was awake', I told him. Somehow, I made up my mind to leave for Sirkazhi.

I told driver Sekhar: 'Be careful in driving. For any reason, our car shouldn't meet with any accident.' Why I mentioned this, was the scare that had settled in my mind that somehow an accident is waiting. He also drove the car sensibly. We reached Sirkazhi in the evening. There was light rain dribbles.

As the drama was to be staged in open air, if it rains, it had to be cancelled. Yes, on that day, my mind was not settled for acting. If one asks why, I cannot answer. Somehow, the drama should not take place. That was my wish [on that day]. When it rained, I felt pleased, and mentally satisfied. But, mother nature didn't permit me to revel on that pleasure. The rain had stopped. If drama was cancelled, income loss results for us as well as the drama organizer. I wasn't bothered about that, in my mood of that day...

Near the make-up room, I was lying in a bench. Actors and actresses were getting ready. My brother came and asked, 'What's bad?' I replied, 'Mentally feeling unwell. Not in a mood to act.' Around that time, four guys brought an immense-sized garland, carrying in a bamboo pole – like how they carry a [dead] pig. When I saw it, I asked, 'To whom this garland is?'

'It's for you' they retorted. 'Specially made with flowers that won't wilt. We had hung it in the flower shop for two days, for people to admire.' They mentioned this with pride. Without thinking, I quipped instantly with speed, 'I will not wear this. It seems like a one which is offered to the God.' They thought that I'm joking, and with a smile in their face, had hung it in a nearby bamboo pole, which was placed for dresses.

Though how much I liked that drama to be cancelled on that particular day, it did commence quickly. Drama was staged. In a fight scene, my leg broke (I'll describe the details later.) Drama was stopped. What I feared about this accident from the morning of that day, did happen to me. It didn't happen to others and luckily to me! I returned with a broken leg and a big question mark about my [professional] future."

Leg Injury in 1959

The anti-climax to MGR's stage career occurred in June 16, 1959. While staging the drama 'Pleasant Dream' at Sirkazhi, MGR was supposed to raise a heavy-build actor Kundumani (approximately 300 kg body weight) in an action scene. He had accidentally stepped into a

hole in the stage, and Kundumani had carelessly fell directly onto MGR's left leg. As such, left tibia had broken instantly. The drama on that day was stopped as a result of such a serious accident. Those who had attended, especially the women fans, could only cry. MGR could only offer solace to his fans that he would stage the same drama after recuperation from injury.

After returning to Madras, orthopedics specialist Rama Rao was consulted and he made serious

efforts to rebuild MGR's damaged left tibia. Assistant Ravindar had recorded what happened next. While the rumor spread in Madras studios and in the print media, that MGR's movie career had come to an abrupt end, he found it difficult to stay in leg cast for weeks. He had considered as a penance. To spend time wisely in recuperation, MGR bought a 16 mm projector and with the help of projector operator Padmanaban, watched movies daily. One of the movies that attracted his attention was the 1954 Hitchcock classic, 'Rear Window' featuring James Stewart. In it, Jimmy Stewart had offered a superb performance with a leg cast. MGR became interested in adopting such a story and suggested to Ravindar to compose a story so that he could act with leg cast and make it a fresh beginning for his movie career.

That was the period that trolley and micro zoom were introduced in India and with the help of photography technician R.R. Chandran, MGR thought of setting the scenes in a room. However, his elder brother Chakrapani and family doctor P.R. Subramaniam had put a stop for such a movie venture.

Decision to Control the Story plots of his Movies

Ravindar also had recorded the following fundamental thoughts of MGR (which I have highlighted in italics below) in his memoir. Few of the movies starring MGR that were released after his leg injury were unsuccessful at box office. These included, Thai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali ('A Thaali tied by mother to her daughter', released on Dec.31,

1959, produced and directed by R.R.Chandran), and Raja Desingu ('King Desingu', released on Sept.2, 1960, produced by Lena Chettiar and directed by T.R. Ragunath). It appears that MGR was hurt by the box office failure of Thai Magallukku Kattiya Thaali, which had his mentor Annadurai's story plot, and scripted by another DMK literateur Rama Arangannal. Ravindar records, that one critic had offered a verdict 'shame' for this movie. When this was brought to MGR's notice, he commented, "Anyone has the right to criticize. When someone criticize you, one should check whether we have such a defect, and then correct ourselves. If this is not so, one should bring this to the critic's attention. We should accept our faults with open heart, and reject such criticism when the critic is wrong. This should be one's life lesson."

MGR also did accept the criticism fairly for this movie. "As there are 12 organs in a body, this movie business also has 12 organs. One who can comprehend the functions of all organs should direct a movie. If a specialist who handles one particular aspect of a movie, becomes a director, he would focus his attention only on his speciality, and ignores other vital aspects. The director of this Thai Magalluku Kattiya Thaali movie, R.R. Chandran, was a specialist cinematographer. His focus was only on camera. As such, he had ignored other vital aspects of the movie." was MGR's verdict.

MGR was obliged to producer S.M. Letchumanan Chettiar (Lena Chettiar), a remarkable personality in Tamil movie world from 1930s to 1950s. Randor Guy had written repeatedly about the exploits of this producer in his regular 'Blast from the Past' series. For such references, see the sources listed below. Lena Chettiar had produced the successful MGR starrer Madurai Veeran ('Hero of Madurai', released in 1956). It was a popular folk story, and a rare MGR movie in which the protagonist dies at the end (true to the folk story). The script for the movie was written by poet Kannadasan. However, MGR had disagreement with the producer in placing a well-received dance scene/song featuring Padmini, according to an insider view presented by 'Film News' Anandan. Though MGR had opposed this scene/song being

included in the movie, the producer had overruled MGR and had inserted the scene/song according to his wish. The script formulation for Raja Desingu (‘The king Desingu’), a subsequent movie produced by the same producer Lena Chettiar, was not to MGR’s liking, though the latter didn’t antagonize the producer this time. Again, the script writer for the movie was poet Kannadasan. Both Madurai Veeran and Raja Desingu had double heroines, namely P. Bhanumathi and Padmini.

Temperamental differences MGR had developed with heroine Bhanumathi’s cooperation during the production of his own movie Nadodi Mannan (Vagabond King, released in 1958) as well as budding political differences with Kannadasan (who was on the verge of deserting DMK party), might have also affected the successful completion of Raja Desingu before release.

Ravindar also records that, even another movie Madapura (‘Balcony Pigeon’, released on Feb. 16, 1962, produced by B. Vallinayagam and directed by S.A.Subburaman) did not have a successful run, as expected. Thus, MGR came to a determined decision on selecting his future movie projects. His coherent view was that, “One shouldn’t bend to the wishes of the producer. The story plot should be ideal. If it is not so, one should demand the right to re-structure the story plot.” This became his prime focus to deliver successful, crowd-pleasing movies. MGR’s logic was, “One can work with those who know everything. One can also work with those who don’t know anything. But, one shouldn’t work with those who know nothing, but pretends to know everything.”

Concluded with one of MGR’s logic in movie making; which is, “One can work with those who know everything. One can also work with those who don’t know anything. But, one shouldn’t work with those who know nothing, but pretends to know everything.”

In retrospect, none can find fault with this logic. Not only in movie world, but even among academics, technicians, journalists and critics, we do find half-baked criticism rendered by those who don’t know anything, but pretends to know everything. Thus, it is apt now to tackle the criticism of movie critics on MGR’s modus operandi in movie

making. I focus on three such critics, Chidananda Das Gupta, M.S.S. Pandian and Prof. K. Sivathamby. All three conspicuously had 'Communist-Socialist-Progressive' interests in their writing. Among these three, Pandian and Sivathamby are Tamil literate, but Das Gupta (being a Bengali native) is not.



MGR with his DMK mentor C.N. Annadurai (in 1960s)

Chidananda Das Gupta (1921-2011) was a film critic, who established his name as a co-founder of Calcutta Film Society (in 1947) and the Federation of Film Societies of India (in 1960). He also promoted himself as a Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) scholar. Satyajit Ray is recognised as one of the 20th century auteurs of Indian cinema. Actress and director Aparna Sen (born 1945) was a daughter of Das Gupta.

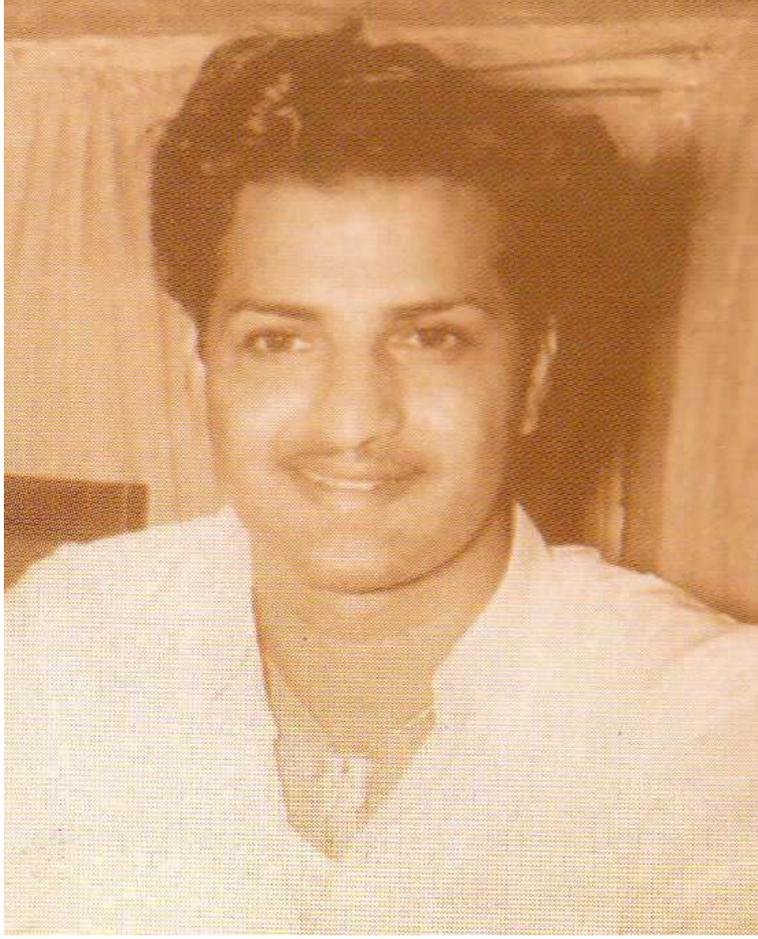
Das Gupta published an anthology of his studies in India's Popular Cinema in 1991. Among the 11 chapters of this work, two specifically focused on MGR and his contemporary N.T. Rama Rao, a Telugu movie star who also had appeared in Tamil movies in 1950s and early 1960s. Rama Rao also followed MGR's steps into Indian politics and became the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in 1983. Das Gupta's analysis

was riddled with (1) factual errors on the career of MGR, as well as the name of MGR itself, (2) name calling, and (3) condescension of Tamil Nadu masses. This is nothing new among the Indian pedants who had subscribed to Communist-Socialist ideology. I quote his thoughts below, and offer my comments to that.

Thought 1: “Men do become gods in the cinema; but some of the cinema’s gods too have become men of power on earth of avatars of Krishna or Rama. Indeed the two of them who promised, and created, something of the illusion of realizing Ramrajya, both bear his name – Madanapally (sic!) Gopala Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu and Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh. The process of equation of myth with fact, the easy movement of the mind between the two, is helped by the nature of visual perception in pre-industrial societies.”

First, the term ‘Ramrajya’ (i.e, the ideal kingdom ruled by Lord Rama) was promoted by none other than Mahatma Gandhi, in pursuing his goal of Indian independence. Thus, the ‘Ramrajya’ concept predates the entry of both MGR and Rama Rao into cinema. In fact, Gandhi’s emphasis on religion is suggested as one of the reasons for Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) to raise the call for a separate Muslim dominant Pakistan state. Gandhi was the first to promise and create an illusion of realizing Ramrajya! Secondly, not all actors who carried the ‘Rama’ name were able to achieve successful careers in either cinema or politics, even if they had bothered to indulge in politics in Tamil Nadu or Andhra Pradesh. For example, there were four ‘Ramaswamys’ in Tamil movie world who were contemporaries of MGR. These were, K.R. Ramasamy, V.K. Ramasamy, ‘Friend’ Ramasamy and Srinivasa Iyer (Cho) Ramaswamy, and two ‘Ramachandrans’ (T.R.R and T.K.R). Why none of them were able to execute the ‘Rama’ magic among the Tamil Nadu masses? Consider the case of comedian Cho Ramaswamy, who simultaneously indulged in cinema and politics, like MGR, especially making fun of latter’s policies? Why he couldn’t attract mass support

and rise to the top like that of MGR? Thus, bearing a 'Rama' name was not a talisman for the career success for either MGR or Rama Rao.



N.T. Rama Rao

Thought 2: “Only in high-literacy areas subjected to Western thought structures, especially rationalism and Marxist materialism, such as the states of Kerala and West Bengal, does the cinema audience have a ready ability to separate myth from fact. Prem Nazir held the Guinness Book record for having made the largest number of films of any actor in the world (more than 600), but when he developed political ambitions, the people of Kerala made it quite clear that their matinee idol in the cinema would not be acceptable as their political chief. This is in direct contrast to M.G. Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu or N.T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh.”

Das Gupta seems ignorant of one critical fact that actor Prem Nazir (1926-1989) was a Muslim by birth! His birth name was Chiriyinkil Abdul Khader! In the history of Kerala state, only one Muslim (C.H. Mohammed Koya) had held the chief ministership for a short period of 51 days, in 1979. I consider this as the main reason, why Prem Nazir's political horse couldn't fly in Kerala. Despite the so-called 'rationalism and Marxist materialism' in which Kerala state seems to be drenched, old fashioned religious intolerance among voters still reign high!

Thought 3: *“MGR's image was more consciously and meticulously planned and executed than Hitler's or Stalin's cinematic strategy. Leni Riefenstahl was too talented to be useful enough to Hitler for any length of time; Stalin had no end of trouble with geniuses like Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko, and had no joy out of the mediocre. MGR's directors, on the other hand, served his every wish faithfully, with the result that when MGR stood before the electorate, his victory was a foregone conclusion.”*

As is the wont of Communist-Progressive ideologues, Das Gupta indulges in name calling, in comparing MGR's movie strategy to that of Hitler and Stalin. In fact, when one studies the Soviet film development during Stalin's era, following facts become evident about which Das Gupta seems ignorant. I selectively quote from Peter Kenez's report in 'The Oxford History of World Cinema' (1996).

(1) *“Socialist realist novels and films followed a master plot: the hero, under the tutelage of a positive character, a Party leader with well-developed Communist class-consciousness overcomes obstacles, unmasks the villain, a person with unreasoned hatred for decent socialist society, and in the process himself acquires superior consciousness – that is, becomes a better person.”*

(2) *“A recurrent theme in films dealing with contemporary life was the struggle against saboteurs and traitors.”*

(3) *“According to official doctrine, it was the script-writer, rather than the director, who was the crucial figure and ultimately responsible. Stalin thought that the director was merely a technician whose only task was to position the camera, following instructions already in the script.”*

In fact, all most all the MGR’s films followed the above three strategies to the dot, which was appropriate to the Soviet society. Rather than the director, MGR relied on a good script writer for his movies. As I have indicated in part 11 of this series, 11 out of 25 of his movies in the 1950s decade were scripted by DMK party affiliates Karunanidhi (5 movies), Kannadasan (4 movies) as well as Asaithambi and Rama Arangannal (2 movies) to propagate DMK ideology.

Criticism of M.S. S. Pandian (1992)

M. S. Pandian also has made identical criticism on the formula of MGR’s movies to that of Das Gupta. Pandian had written as follows:

“The social universe of the MGR films is one of asymmetrical power. At one end of the power spectrum are grouped the upper caste men/women, the landlords/rich industrialists, the literate elite and, of course, the ubiquitous male – all of who exercise unlimited authority and indulge in oppressive acts of power; at the other end of the spectrum can be found the hapless victims – lower caste men, the landless poor, the exploited workers, the illiterate simpletons and helpless women.”

Then, he identified MGR role as, “the subaltern protagonist, in the course of the conflict, appropriates several signs or symbols of authority/power of those who dominate... Three signs repeatedly and prominently appear in MGR films. They are (a) the authority to dispense justice and exercise violence, (b) access to literacy/education, and (c) access to women.”

Plot wise, MGR’s movies hardly vary from either the Soviet era films of Stalin period, or that of cowboy Westerns by John Wayne. Thus, my

earlier comments do stand and need not be repeated again. One additional criticism of Pandian was that of MGR cavalierly changing the ending of movies to his whims. Specifically, Pandian made the following comment.

“’Oli Vilakku’ (1968), which is the Tamil remake of the extremely popular Hindu film ‘Phool Aur Patthar’ and was produced by S.S. Vasan. In the Hindi original, featuring Dharmendra and Meena Kumari, the hero marries the widow at the end. But in the Tamil version, the ending of the film was changed at the instance of MGR himself, so that the widow dies a tragic death and the hero weds an unmarried woman.”



Brando with Miiko-Taka in ‘Sayonara’

Movie critics, unversed with the reality of movies as a business commodity, do carp too much on the realism of the plot. Here is a gem from Das Gupta: “In order to mature, the cinema must pass through the litmus test of realism, if only to reject it later, after proving its ability to distinguish fact from myth. This aspect of cinema has remained almost completely outside the scope of India’s popular film. All popular cinema tends towards melodrama by telescoping the process in order to stress the high points of drama; but within that constraint, the best examples of

it are able to provide non-verbal resonances, often of a high order.” But his own daughter, Aparna Sen (as a director) did have business sense when she commented, “All I want is that my producer should never lose money on the kind of films I make. I would be happy if he came back to me and asked me to direct another feature.” in an interview in 1983.

One can cite that in Hollywood movies there had been precedence flouting realism for imagination and for such twisting of movie plots at the end, according to the whims of the hero. I provide two examples, from the autobiographies of Charlie Chaplin and Marlon Brando.

Chaplin had the following comment on portraying realism in movies. “I was depressed by the remark of a young critic who said that ‘City Lights’ was very good, but that it verged on the sentimental, and that in my future films I should try to approximate realism. I found myself agreeing with him. Had I known what do now, I could have told him that so-called realism is often artificial, phoney, prosaic and dull; and that it is not reality that matters in a film but what the imagination can make of it.” Now, ‘City Lights’(1931) – a silent film at that – with few simple sets and fluid editing is deemed as one of the best movie classics.



Chaplin with Virginia Cherrill in ‘City Lights’

Pandian, while conceding that “MGR was well-versed in every aspect of film making – direction, camera, music, editing etc., and he utilized all these skills in constructing an image for himself” also carps that “According to Cho Ramaswamy, a co-actor of MGR in a number of films, ‘All the fights in his [MGR’s] films were personally shot and edited by him’ ”

My comment is nothing but, ‘So what?’ That’s how true professionals, like Chaplin, operate. Marlon Brando did provide the reasons why he wanted to change the ending of one of his movies, ‘Sayonara’, to be in line with his own policy and thought. ‘Sayonara’ movie was based on James Michener’s novel by the same name. To quote,

“I read the novel, Sayonara, which was set in postwar Japan, and thought it raised interesting issues about human relations, but I didn’t like the script. In the script and the novel, the character [Joshua] Logan wanted me to play, Major Lloyd Gruver, a Korean war-era U.S. Air Force pilot, fell in love with a beautiful Japanese woman, Hana-ogi, a member of a distinguished and elite dance troupe, but their interracial romance was doomed by the tradition in both cultures of endogamy, the custom of marrying only within one’s own race or caste. In accepting this principle, I thought the story endorsed indirectly a form of racism. But with a different ending, I thought it could be an example of the pictures I wanted to make, films that exerted a positive force. I told Logan, I’d do the picture if the Madame Butterfly ending was replaced by one stating that there was nothing wrong with racial intermarriage, and that it was a natural outcome when people fell in love. I wanted the two lovers to marry at the end of the picture, and Logan agreed.

But once we were in Japan, I discovered that Josh was burdened with an overwhelming depression that made him unable to function. I ended up rewriting and improvising a lot of the picture, and we had to limp along as best we could.”

Again, Marlon Brando emphasizes the point, what MGR would have agreed whole heartedly. He had written, “I wanted to make pictures that

were not only entertaining but had social value and gave me a sense that I was helping to improve the condition of the world.”

If two of the much respected legends (Chaplin and Brando) do agree with MGR’s sense of taste in Tamil movie making, then one wonders about the degree of ignorance among upstart critics like Das Gupta, Pandian and Sivathamby!

Film Snobs as Critics

The problem with the Indian movie critics was that they came to subscribe to the ‘auteur theory’ passionately in late 1950s, following the success of director Satyajit Ray in the international arena of films. Tamil movie critics tuned in to identify the auteurs among Tamil cinema and did check C.V. Sridhar, K.S. Gopalakrishnan, A. Bhimsingh and K. Balachander in 1950s and 1960s. Among these, only K.S. Gopalakrishnan had co-directed one MGR movie ‘Panakkari’ [Rich woman, 1953], an adoption of Anna Karenina plot, which flopped in box office. Though he didn’t direct MGR, K. Balachander (born 1930) was initially introduced to Tamil movies by him, when MGR offered script-writing role for one of his movies Theiva Thai (1964).

Kamp and Levi described the ‘auteur theory’ as, “Immutable tenet of film theory that holds that the director, rather than the screenwriter, producer or star, is the ‘author’ of a film. First posited by Francois Truffaut in Cahier du Cinema in 1954, Americanized by Andrew Sarris in Film Culture in 1962, and then ridiculed by the gad fly Pauline Kael, in Film Quarterly in 1963. Though the debate over the auteur theory’s worth subsided long ago, snobs still brandish the theory to make cases for the greatness of such unworthies David Fincher.”

Kirk Douglas (born 1916), one of the few still living legends of Hollywood’s studio era, had commented on the auteur theory in his autobiography, as follows: “I’ve always been intrigued with this auteur theory that came across the ocean from Europe and contaminated our

system. The auteur theory holds that the director is the creator of the film. A film is a collaborative effort. It is rare that a movie is ever one person's film. Perhaps people like Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, Woody Allen, Barbra Striesand, who write, direct, and star in their pictures, are entitled to that billing. Yet even they need help – producers, casting directors, editors, technicians, location managers, other actors.”

Das Gupta in his analysis on MGR's movie career, makes abysmal factual errors, which revealed his utter lack of facts-checking skills. He had noted. “The first film in which MGR played the lead was written by Karunanidhi in 1950 and called Meruda Nattu Ilavarasi”. This was wrong, as I had indicated previously. The first MGR- Karunanidhi collaboration and the film in which MGR played the lead was in 1947, in the movie ‘Rajakumari’. Then, in more than one occasion of his book, Das Gupta mentions that MGR had acted in 292 films in his long career. This was also wrong. MGR's total tally was only 133, between 1936 and 1978.

If Das Gupta had bothered to the study the cinematic and political careers of Rama Rao and MGR in depth, he might have inferred that superficial similarities are only a few; but, more differences can be noted in their preparation for political careers and how their political careers ended. I provide a short paragraph that appeared in 1982 in an anonymous commentary in Link magazine.

“From the manifesto released by the Telugu Desam Party a day or two prior to the first State level meeting, it was clear that the new regional party was quite different from the ‘Self Respector’ movement launched by E.V.Ramaswami in Madras some decades ago: not has it anything in common with the DMK or even the AIADMK. More than that NTR himself has nothing in common with either the great Periyar, or Annadurai or even with MGR.”

MGR joined Annadurai's DMK party in 1953 and was a member of it until October 1972. Karunanidhi, who followed Annadurai to leadership in 1969, threw out MGR in 1972 on disciplinary grounds. In

consequence, MGR formed his own party and named it after Anna, as Anna DMK (ADMK).

John Wayne and MGR

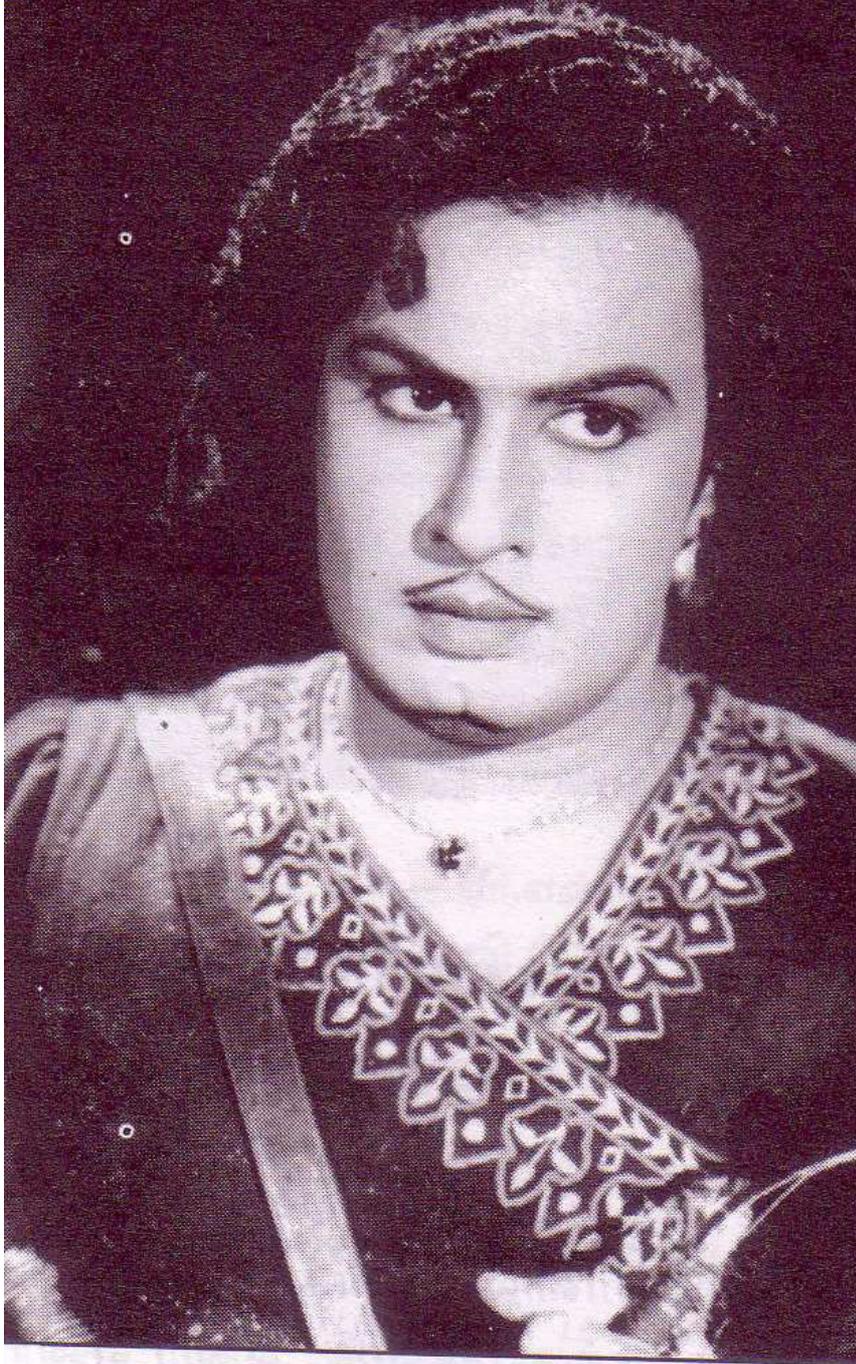
To the taunt of snob critics (Das Gupta and Pandian) that all MGR movies have the 'same plot and same ending', his Hollywood contemporary John Wayne had offered a typical answer. "I've never had a goddam artistic problem in my life, never, and I've worked with the best of them. John Ford isn't exactly a bum, is he? Yet he never gave me any manure about art." And again, "I play John Wayne in every part regardless of the character, and I've been doing okay, haven't I?" It could well be, the euphemistic word 'manure' was not the one which John Wayne would have used; it probably was 'softened' posthumously by the editorial desk of 'Guinness Movie Facts & Feats' for propriety, and in fact refers to 'shit' in English slang. MGR would have said the same thing. He did work with auteur directors of Tamil movie industry in his earlier years, beginning with Ellis Dungan, Raja Chandrasekar and A.S.A. Samy. In his closing years of movie career (in 1970s), even C.V. Sridhar came to MGR to direct two of his movies, specifically for financial reasons. More about this later!

It is also appropriate to include an observation by Katherine Hepburn, the heroine of Wayne's 'Rooster Cogburn' movie. Both were of same age and belonged to the same Hollywood super-star cohort. Hepburn, in her autobiographical memoirs had noted in her inimitable clipped-style of talking, "John Wayne is the hero of the thirties and forties and most of the fifties. Before the creeps came creeping in. Before, in the sixties, the male hero slid right down into the valley of the weak and the misunderstood. Before the women began dropping any pretense to virginity into the gutter; with a disregard for truth which is indeed pathetic. And unisex was born. The hair grew long and the pride grew short..." What Katherine Hepburn had said of Wayne, do apply to MGR as well, with a marginal alteration in the first sentence, as follows, 'MGR is the hero of the fifties and sixties and most of the seventies.' in Tamil movies.

Katherine Hepburn continues further, about Wayne: “Politically he is a reactionary. He suffers from a point of view based entirely on his own experience.” This was same with MGR too. Then, on the acting talent of Wayne, Hepburn had this evaluation: “As an actor, he has an extraordinary gift. A unique naturalness. Developed by movie actors who just happen to become actors. Gary Cooper had it. An unselfconsciousness. An ability to think and feel. Seeming to woo the camera. A very subtle capacity to think and express and caress the camera – the audience. With no apparent effort. A secret between them.” Again, each ‘sentence’ does apply to MGR’s style of acting as well.

Then, as of now, carping cinema critics have had a couple of serious problems. Their tone of criticism was nothing but crass elitism, and on top of that they were also ignorant about the logistics and economics of movie making. To counter such criticism, I offer the following details about the status of movie production in India in 1950s. To understand how MGR shaped his career in Tamil movies, these details are vital indeed.

Mr. S.S. Vasan (1903-1969)



‘மர்மயோகி’ – எம்.ஜி.ராமச்சந்திரன்
(1951)

MGR in ‘Marma Yogi’ (The Mysterious Mystic 1951) movie

Thiruthuraipoondi Subramanian Srinivasan (known popularly by shortened version, S.S. Vasam, 1903-1969) was one of India's print industry and movie moguls from Brahmin stock. Like MGR, he also had lost his father at an early age. By perseverance of his mother and his own diligence, he made it to the top. I'm not aware whether a good biography of him exists in English, other than a short, humorous memoir of 47 pages, by writer Ashokamitran (a pen name, b. 1931) that appeared in 2002. Tamil movie historian Randor Guy also briefly annotated Vasam's career in one chapter of his 1997 book.

Ashokamitran had merely reached 20, when he joined the Gemini Studios, headed by Vasam, who employed around 600 individuals in his studio. While recollecting the incident when Vasam (as the boss) chopped music director C. Ramachandra's score for lack of tempo despite the pleadings from Ramachandra, Ashokamitran humorously observed the personality of Vasam; "Vasam could make even a railway time-table have tempo. Only, with such tempo, you may not get the timings right all the time."

MGR had treated Vasam as a patron figure for his kindness and helpful attitude to suffering artistes like him. Thus, Vasam does receive appreciative mention in MGR's autobiographical chapters 116, 117 and 118, for assisting him and his third wife V. N. Janaki when they had a serious legal issue with the latter's then 'guardian' in late 1940s. For propriety reasons, MGR had omitted identifying this 'guardian' by name in 1972. He had identified this person, with a phrase 'a person like a guardian'; he does use the English word 'guardian' rather than the appropriate equivalent Tamil word. MGR had left for the readers to guess, who this 'guardian' was, who also gave much trouble to both of them. My guess, based on circumstantial evidence from MGR's descriptions of this person, was it's none other than Janaki's first husband Ganapathi Bhat.

Film Seminar of 1955

A Film Seminar event, sponsored by the Sangeet Natak Akadami, was held in New Delhi from February 27th to March 4th in 1955. It was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Over 40 leading personalities of Indian movie industry from three centers of movie industry (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras) and New Delhi participated in it and 23 papers were presented. Then, there were discussions on each of these presentations by other participants. Here is the list of participants.

Bengal: M.D. Chatterji, Debaki Kumar Bose, Suprova Mookerji, Ajit Bose, Probodh Kumar Sanyal, Pankaj Mullick, Pasupati Chattopadhyay, Nomita Sinha, Ahindra Chowdhuri, Modhu Sil, Souren Sen, Dr. R.M. Ray.

Bombay: Durga Khote, Nargis, V. Shantaram, Bimal Roy, Kishore Sahu, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Anil Biswas, K.A.Abbas, Dewan Sharar, B.M. Tata, M.R. Acharekar, K.M. Modi, Baburao K. Pai, M. Akbar Fazalbhoy, David Abraham.

Delhi: Uday Shankar, Narendra Sharma, M. Bhavnani, R. Ranjan, Seth Jagat Narain, Jagannath Prasad Jhalani, C.V. Desai, Nirmala Joshi.

Madras: S.S.Vasan, B.N. Reddi, R.M. Seshadri, N.C. Sen Gupta, V. Ramaswamy, Marcus Bartley, Y.G. Doraiswamy.

I provide a scan of the photo taken at the Film Seminar nearby. Senior personalities were seated. S.S.Vasan is seated 2nd from the left. In the 1st row (standing), one can recognize R. Ranjan (4th from right). In the 2nd row (standing), notable Hindi actors Dilip Kumar (3rd from right) and Raj Kapoor (2nd from right) can be seen.

Though MGR was not a participant, his then rival for the 'action-hero' slot in Tamil movies R. Ranjan did participate as a representative from Delhi. Madras contingent was led by mogul S.S.Vasan, who was also a patron figure for MGR. Ranjan himself had starred in Vasan's successful production Chandralekha (1948) as a villain. The hero in this movie, was MGR's mentor, M.K. Radha (see, Part 12 of this series). On

February 28th, 1955, Vasan presented his lengthy paper, 'Film Production in India Today'. On the previous day (Feb.27, 1955), prime minister Nehru while inaugurating the Seminar had expressed his views on Vasan's paper, because the latter had sent a presentation copy to Nehru, probably as a courtesy. One is not sure, whether Nehru himself requested it from Vasan to prepare his inaugural talk. Nevertheless Vasan's lengthy presentation had a total of 60 items, in the printed report.

'Film Production in India Today' by S.S. Vasan



Gemini S.S. Vasan

I provide a synopsis of the issues Vasan delivered, in his own words, below.

Item 5: A film is the end-product of the labours of a number of artist-technicians. It is a symphony of cooperative effort. Actors, directors, art

directors, script writers, cameramen, soundmen, editors, all have to work together under the leadership of a producer for a common object.

Item 10: The great majority of the cinema audiences tend to favour melodrama and other easier forms of emotional expression.

Item 25: India has produced about 7,000 feature films so far. It has 73 studios, situated chiefly in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. There are about 3,000 cinemas. Well, what do these figures represent? To know if these figures are encouraging or not, one must appraise them on the background of our vast population. India's population is over 360 million. In other words we have only 8.5 theatres for a million people. This is the lowest figure for any progressive country in the world. The average number of theatres for a million people in America and England is said to be over 125. Our number is 1/16th of that in those two countries, as far as theatres are concerned...

Item 27: The most important reason is, I think, that public men and philosophers have neglected the careful study of the cinema. When they think of the cinema, they think only of sex and immorality; they do not think of the good things about the cinema. Many of them seem to have a closed mind on the subject. They are suffering under a complex, caused by the age-old prejudice of the so-called 'genteel' folk towards any kind of show business and the men engaged in it...

Item 28: The main reason for this prejudice is perhaps that members of this profession, unlike those engaged in most other professions, always depend on public support and patronage for their very existence. The showman, like the politician, exists only at the pleasure of the public. He is always dispensable, not indispensable....

Item 34: What are the uses to which the cinema can be put? It can be used as a powerful supplementary aid in education. It can be and is, as a matter of fact, to a very large extent, used as a means of propaganda, publicity and advertisement...

Item 35: I take it that it is agreed on all hands that recreation and entertainment are almost as important as food, clothing and shelter...

Item 42: ...the general impression that film makers make huge profits. It is not realised that the majority of film producers lose money in their productions. The number of producers of unsuccessful pictures is legion, and their financial mortality is unknown, because dead pictures, like dead men, tell no tales.

Item 45: ...Because the cinema is said to corrupt morals, and does not educate, it is not allowed to expand freely. Because cinema-man is said to be making lots of money, he is taxed heavily. Government's attitude appears to me to be: 'I won't allow you to grow. I will also tax you heavily!' ...

Item 49: As far as I can see, friends, this is indeed a vicious circle. The quality of films does not improve because the industry is not allowed to grow. The industry is not allowed to grow because the quality of films has not improved!...

Item 51: The Central Government also could contribute liberally to the industry's growth in its own way, i.e., by administering its censor code liberally and not literally...

Item 54: Censorship was imposed during the British rule to see that nothing was allowed which would upset the then system our government. But now we are a free nation. There is no question of upsetting our Government. Hence the State-sponsored system of censorship must slowly fade out, giving place to self-censorship by the industry itself, as in our progressive countries.

There is no doubt that Vasani, as a representative of movie industry, presented his case strongly and effectively. But, what was the reaction from the Indian government? Prime-minister Nehru's thoughts were not conciliatory on what Vasani had pleaded.

Participants at the Film Seminar 1955

Prime Minister Nehru's Inaugural Address (of Feb.27, 1955)

I quote the relevant two paragraphs of Nehru's address in which he responded to Vasan's plea.

“An eminent figure in the film world, Mr. Vasan, sent me some days ago a copy of the address which he proposes to deliver at some stage of this Seminar. Well, it was lying about with me. Again, when I heard of these controversies, I tried to find time to read through it, although normally, I may confess I would not have read it. So I read it. I might tell you, I did not find anything terrible in it. In fact it was quite mild. Possibly, if I had been writing something like that, I might have used stronger language in regard to various matters (applause). That does not mean that I agree with all that Mr. Vasan said (laughter), not at all. But the point is, these are some of the subjects which are raised, obviously deserving careful study and consideration. One subject, for instance, Mr. Vasan and the industry are, no doubt, greatly interested in and he talks about, is the reduction or abolition of entertainment tax. About that, I propose to say nothing at all except that I am not convinced by Mr. Vasan's argument. I am not talking about the rate of it – I don't know what it is in various places. But I do not see at all, broadly speaking, why entertainment should not be taxed. To what extent they should be taxed is a different matter – I cannot say, it may be more or less.

Another subject which Mr. Vasan has mentioned – there are several – is something about censorship. Now this is a difficult subject so far as I am concerned, because I start with a certain presumption against censorships; I am, I am sorry to say, still affected considerably by my old 19th century traditions in regard to such matters. So I do not take favourably to too much restriction or too much censorship. On the other hand, it is quite absurd, it seems to me, for anyone to talk about unrestricted liberty in important matters affecting the public, to leave people to do what they like. Suppose, as might well happen, that the production of the atomic bomb became cheaper and simpler. Well, are we going to allow, in the name of full liberty of the individual, everybody to carry an atom bomb with him in his pocket? Certainly not. So this

question of some high principle in favour of censorship or against it has no meaning to me except that broadly speaking one should not restrict and interfere. I accept that. But one has to interfere, the State has to interfere to some extent. To what extent is another matter.”

While reading the lecture made by Vasam and Nehru’s response to it simultaneously in totality, after 49 years, one can easily infer that Nehru was skillful in deflecting serious issues. His logic of comparing Vasam’s plea for less censorship in movies to that of permitting ‘pocket atom-bombs, if they become available’ was inept and like comparing apples and oranges!

The vagary of Indian censorship style was experienced by MGR too. His 1951 movie ‘Marma Yogi’ (The Mysterious Mystic) received an ‘Adults Only’ certificate (a first for a Tamil movie) for an unconvincing reason that the story plot involves ‘a ghost’! Considering this fact, Nehru’s defense of the sensibilities of Indian movie censors in 1955 with ‘pocket atom-bomb’ analogy has to be taken as nothing but a joke! The heroine of ‘Marma Yogi’ movie Anjali Devi (1927-2014) died last month (Jan.13, 2014) at the age of 86. And it was the first movie which had MGR- Anjali Devi combination. Since then, the same MGR-Anjali Devi pair worked successfully in three more movies, Sarvadhikari (The Dictator, 1951), Chakravarthi Thirumakal (Princess of the Emperor, 1957) and Mannathi Mannan (King of Kings, 1960). About Anjali Devi’s status in early 1950s, MGR had reminisced passingly in an early chapter of his autobiography as follows: “I was acting with big-name actresses Mrs. Anjali Devi and Mrs. Bhanumathi in a few movies. They were acting in many films. Like now (~1970), I didn’t have many movies then. At that time, my earning was not even one tenth of what I receive now. Even though I didn’t have many movies, I was acting in dramas. Equally I was also involved in public events and public duties.”

Two additional presentations made at that 1955 Film Seminar, also deserves attention, for the numbers and thoughts included about the Indian film industry, which its elitist critics diligently ignore.

‘Independent Producers and their contribution’ by Kishore Sahu

PAPERS READ AT THE SEMINAR

1	Dr. P. V. Rajamannar	...	The Film As a Fine Art
2	Shri B. N. Sircar	...	Our Industry
3	Shri S. S. Vasan	...	Film Production in India Today
4	Shri M. Bhavnani	...	The Future of Information Films in India
5	Smt. Suprova Mookerji	...	The Tremendous Advance made in the Technique of Acting
6	Shri M. R. Acharekar	...	The Importance of Art Direction in a Film
7	Shri V. Shantaram	...	The responsibility of Indian Film Producers towards the Public for entertainment Films
8	Shri Souren Sen	...	The Aesthetic and Artistic Value of Beautiful Costumes in Films
9	Shri Kishore Sahu	...	Independent Producers and Their Contribution to the Film Industry
10	Shri Madhu Sil	...	The Art of Sound Recording in a Film
11	Shri Pasupati Chattopadhyay	...	Film Technicians—Their place in the Industry and Their Problems
12	Shri Marcus Bartley	...	Motion Picture Photography.
13	Shri M. Akbar Fazalbhoy	...	Film Equipment—The Technical and Economic Problems of Manufacturing Film Equipment in India
14	Shri Anil Biswas	...	The Wealth of Indian Classical and Folk Music and its place in Films
15	Shri Narendra Sharma	...	Indian Poets and Lyric Writing for Films
16	Shrimati Durga Khote	...	The Film Actress and her Contribution to the Cultural and Social Life of India.
17	Shri R. M. Seshadri, I.C.S. (Retd.)	...	Distribution, Exhibition and Publicity of Motion Pictures in India
18	Shri Keki M. Modi	...	Foreign Exhibition and Distribution
19	Shri David Abraham	...	The Film Artist as the All-Important Facet of the Film Industry
20	Shri Uday Shankar	...	The Message of Dance in Films
21	Shri N. C. Sen Gupta	...	The Film Laboratory
22	Shri K. A. Abbas	...	Dialogue and Dialogue Writers The Importance and Significance of a Good Film Story—Its Power with the Masses.
23	Shri M. D. Chatterji	...	Studio Management and Finance

Kishore Sahu

(1915-1980), a Hindi actor who also carried additional hats as screen writer, producer and director, offered the following statistics for movie production in India, in 1955.

‘India produces on an average 250 movies annually. Bombay led with 160 movies, with Calcutta 50 movies and South India 40 movies.’

'There were about 300 movie producers, but only 60 studios. This meant, four out of every five producers were independents.'

'Other involved players of movie industry were 600 movie distributors (including sub-distributors), 3,500 theater owners. Among these 3,500 were 800 'touring' (tent) theaters.'

'About 100,000 individuals were employed in various branches of the movie industry.'

Biggest problem facing the movie industry, was the lack of adequate finance. To quote Kishore Sahu, "There is no bank that lends us money. For the production of our pictures, we have to borrow from individual money-lenders at such a high rate of interest as is suicidal. That is the reason why 90% of our producers, or even more, sustain losses in most pictures. If a picture succeeds or clicks, the returns are published in all the newspapers and you think that the producers are minting money, that they are all rich. You judge the state of the industry from the figures of returns of one 'hit' picture. The returns of 90% of pictures or more are never published in any newspaper, and so you never know the truth."

'The responsibility of Indian film producers towards the public for entertainment films' by V. Shantaram

Vankudre Shantaram (1901-1990) was an actor, director and producer of Hindi movies, who began his career as an odd job man and silent movie actor. Essence of his presentation is summarized below.

First, the film is a democratic art; it is not an individual expression of a writer, a sculptor, a painter, a photographer, a poet, a musician, a singer or an artiste; it is their collective contribution that makes a work of film art possible...It is also the task of the producer to raise money to make this venture possible and then market it. The film producer is thus in the most unenviable position of an artist as well as businessman; and this dual role that he has to play, puts a very heavy burden on his shoulders.

Secondly, as an artist, his creative work is open to criticism for its aesthetic shortcomings, and hence it is his duty to produce a picture worthy of the motion picture art; as a businessman, his paramount consideration is to ensure the popularity of the picture so that the lakhs [i.e., 100,000s] of rupees invested in the work of art are realized and he is in a position to make more pictures.

Thirdly, the financial burden is rather heavy. For in no other work of art is such a big investment called for. A motion picture's cost varies from two lakhs [200,000] to twenty lakhs [2,000,000] of rupees today, so that his work may stand comparison with the product of the West, cannot afford to make pictures cheaply. So, naturally his primary responsibility is to recover the cost; and to fulfill that responsibility he has to make a picture which will please his customers – the picture-goers. He cannot afford to displease them.

Fourthly, what is the primary need of his customer? The picture-goer goes to see a motion picture for recreation, entertainment; that is his main objective...To please this audience is not an easy task, as it is composed of diverse sections of society with varying tastes and aptitudes.

Shantaram's numbers for a cost of movie in 1950s, had been corroborated by poet Kannadasan in his 1977 diatribe against MGR. Kannadasan's range was 700,000 to 2,000,000 Indian rupees.

S.S. Vasan's additional thoughts

While flipping the 271 pages plus the Appendices of the Film Seminar report, it becomes evident that S.S.Vasan (more than any other attendee) did contribute more in the discussion sections of other presentations. I reproduce another vital contribution made by Vasan, which followed K.A. Abbas's presentation, 'The Importance and significance of a good film story – its power with the masses'. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas (1914-1987) was a successful script writer and director of Hindi movies. Vasan

(as the editor of Ananda Vikatan weekly and as a movie producer) spoke,

“In my life as an editor of a paper for the last 30 years and as a film producer for 15 years, the presentation of stories for the public either through the printed paper or the printed celluloid has always confronted me. In the paper I edited, I always wanted that the stories printed should be entertaining and educative. That experience helped me when I entered the film business. Two words I always bear in mind: ‘Contrast and Compromise’. Whether in film making or in writing or in editing, these words are important. Contrast by itself is art. You will find in all art there is contrast. Whenever a thing goes up, it must come down. If there is black, there must be white. If you take the page of a paper, you will find an illustration and you will find printed matter. Even in god’s creation you will find contrast. That is art. And then compromise. I have always been obliged to compromise on art.

There is no such thing as finality in art. As long as the type of people who come to see your pictures are varied in their taste – their taste is not standardized – as long as you get literate and illiterate, common and uncommon, children, both men and women, as long as their tastes are varied, you have to compromise. You can take a particular theme, but you will have to slightly adapt that theme so that it could be enjoyed by the majority. One cannot be dogmatic. We must produce realistic stories on the screen or what purport to be for the benefit of the nation. You may do that, but you have to slightly compromise even there. If you make it too real, then it is not art. There must be idealism. Too much realism on the screen will only mean that in the final stage you take photographs of people as they are, without makeup. Therefore a touch of compromise is again there. Many types of films are being produced. It is all a question of the felt need.

Even Shri Abbas’s plea to educate the people on the problems of the nation and put the real lives of the nation on the screen is an answer to the need. He feels there is that need. Suppose there is a felt need for very fine entertainment to the people in my locality. I select a picture which is

a hundred percent entertainment. I take it as a felt need. One produces pictures depicting present-day problems. Another produces pictures having rumba dances and music. You cannot say that the second producer is not doing a national service. After all, he might say, after a tiresome day, people want to relax and enjoy themselves. The film serves all types of people.”

Vasan was one movie mogul, who had correctly felt the pulse of illiterate Indian movie goers. Two decades before 1955, Paul Frederick Cressy (of Wheaton College, Massachusetts) published his questionnaire survey among 233 college students from Bombay, Madras, Nagpur, Lucknow and Lahore, in the American Journal of Sociology. The sample included 148 men and 85 women, and the study was done in the spring of 1931. Though he inferred that “No positive conclusions are possible from such a small sample, but they were gathered from representative university communities in widely separated sections of [British] India”, he reported that “Among 144 replies from male students, 56 indicate that they went simply out of a desire for recreation, 23 refer to educational reasons, and 58 combine these two motives.” Cressy’s conclusion was, “The main interests of Indian students in the movies seem to be generally similar to those of students in America. They go to the movies for amusement and recreation; they like pictures which provide adventure and humor.” It should be noted that this study sample belonged to ‘educated’ class [Those Indians who have had an English education], who patronized the Hollywood movies. Indian movies (silent films) of late 1920s and early 1930s had little appeal to this particular class, due to “poor technique [of movie making] and the low reputation of the actors.”

Despite technological advances, whether in 1930 or 1955 or 1980 or 2005, human tastes hardly change even though actors and producers arrive and leave in generational switch.

MGR’s angle in film production

*It is evident from S.S.Vasan's thoughts presented at the 1955 Film Seminar, MGR, as one of his protégés, had taken to heart what Vasan had implied on the functions of cinema in India. First, each movie should be a **mix of education and entertainment** for the so-called illiterate folks of India and elsewhere. Secondly, produced movies should **not fail in earning a profit** for the producers. Thirdly, if one has a hunch that a film project is not worth in earning a profit, it's better to abandon it instantly rather than holding a 'bombed' movie finally. Fourthly, excess taxing by authorities leads to delicate handling of 'black money' which in turn boomerangs as 'tax evasion' claims in the industry.*

Costs of Film Production in 1950s

Historians of Indian film, Barnow and Krishnaswamy had included the currency conversion rates, as follows: For years 1949 to 1963, one American dollar equaled 5 Indian rupees. Thus, 200,000 to 2,000,000 rupees (the range cost of production of a film in India in 1950s) equaled \$40,000 – \$400,000. Satyajit Ray, India's prominent auteur director, had stated in his memoirs, that the budget cost for his first movie Pather Panchali (aka, Song of the Road, 1955) was only 70,000 rupees (~\$14,000). For his second movie in the Apu trilogy, Aparajito (aka, The Unvanquished, 1956), the budget was marginally increased to 106,000 rupees (~\$21,000).

MGR with his second wife Sadhanandavathi

For comparison, I provide the comparative budget figures for five of Hollywood's hit movies in 1950s in chronological order, as provided by van Gelder (1990).

Singin' in the Rain (1952), directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, and starring Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds and Cyd Charrise. Produced by Arthur Freed. \$2,500,000.

Rebel Without a Cause (1955), directed by Nicholas Ray, and starring James Dean, Natalie Wood and Sal Mineo. Produced by David Weisbart. \$600,000.

Some Like It Hot (1959), directed by Billy Wilder, and starring Jack Lemmon, Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis, Joe E. Brown and George Raft. Produced by Billy Wilder. \$3,000,000.

Psycho (1960), directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and starring Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh, Vera Miles, Martin Balsam and John Gavin. Produced by Alfred Hitchcock. \$800,000.

The Magnificent Seven (1960), directed by John Sturges, and starring Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, Eli Wallach, Robert Vaughn, James Coburn and Charles Bronson. Produced by John Sturges. \$2,500,000.

The range of production costs for these five movies were \$600,000 – 3,000,000, all had established stars. Compared to this range, the Guinness Movie Facts & Feats (1991) indicate that the average Hollywood budget for a feature film in 1955 was \$900,000 and in 1960 was \$1,000,000. As is visible, even the highly successful ‘low-budget’ Hollywood movies of 1950s (Rebel Without a Cause and Psycho) had a higher production budget than that of a Tamil movie of that era. Their world-wide appeal for entertainment was wider than the range Indian Tamil movies could have. Then, international market for Indian Tamil movies was limited to only Ceylon, Malaysia and Singapore, where a sizeable Tamil-speaking population was residing.

In mid 1950s, MGR would decide to produce, direct and act in his own movie ‘Nadodi Mannan’ (The Vagabond King) for which he’d opt to spend a fortune and test his ‘sex appeal’ and ‘staying power’ as a marquee actor in Tamil cinema. The budget for this production was recorded at the highest end of the film production range in India. More about this venture will appear later.

Sexuality and *Ménage a Trois* life in 1950s

M.S.S.Pandian, one of the foremost critics of MGR's movie and political careers, had tackled the issue of sexuality and 'Menage a Trois' of MGR, in his 1992 tract 'The Image Trap'. To discuss vital theme, readers should be presented first with Pandian's views, which I do first, citing his text.

"The repressed sexuality of the Tamil woman finds its momentary and unreal liberation in observing these sequences." One may query, what are these 'sexy' sequences, Pandian had bothered to find? Pandian identifies,

"short-sleeved shirts, bare chest, rippling muscles and tight fitting clothes – MGR on the screen revels in his physicality and, in this context, a certain auto-eroticism communicates itself most effectively to female viewers." Then, Pandian identified 'at least three points' which influence the sexual 'freedom' of the 'female audience'. These are, to quote Pandian's words,

"First, in a society where female voyeurism is censored as culturally unacceptable, the darkened atmosphere of the cinema hall is perhaps one of the very few places where women can indulge in voyeurism. Thus, the flickering images on the screen gain an added relevance for women spectators."

"Secondly, by attributing desire to the heroine and at the same time distancing the hero from desire, these films assert MGR's masculinity. This notion of the 'distant' hero also proves effective in deferring female sexual gratification and, thereby, definite patriarchal limits are set to this 'free release' of female sexuality."

"Thirdly, MGR being represented on the screen as an idealized 'object' of female desire does, at another level, turn him into an ego-ideal for the male audience themselves."

MGR and V.N. Janaki pair in Mohini

*My simple criticism for this sort of selective, cherry-picking analysis by Pandian is that he had been making a mountain out of a mole hill, without due control samples of MGR's contemporary heroes from Tamil cinema. For instance, in expanding his second point (stated above), Pandian also had included the following sentence. "It is important to note here that in several of MGR films more than one women desires and pursues the hero and, unlike the usual Tamil films, the hero does not marry in the course of the film but only at the end, that is, once his 'other' more important worldly/manly duties are performed." (p.83) Opposed to this line, many examples do exist in MGR movies that in the story plot, his character is married to only one woman at the beginning or in the first half of the film, and **not at the end**. The best examples are, Koondu Kili (The Caged Parrot, 1954; the only movie in which he starred with Sivaji Ganesan), Maha Devi (The Great Devi, 1957; the first movie he starred with ranking Southern star Savitri), Thai Magalukku Kattiya Thali (Thali tied by mother to her daughter, 1959; story plot from C.N. Annadurai). In fact, few pages later, Pandian had covered the story plot of Maha Devi film in detail (p.89), thus contradicting his own view.*

Another specific issue which Pandian picked up was that in his movies, MGR impressed his world-view on siding with the rural folks in preference to that of uppity behavior of educated urban women. In Pandian's words, "Interestingly, the woman who is tamed by the hero [MGR, that is] is normally urban, educated and from the upper class, indulging in a bit of English on and off. In the dichotomized social universe of MGR films, this helps the hero not only to affirm male domination, but also to play upon the rural-urban divide and to stamp the countryside with a certain authenticity and constitute it as a repository of culture."

So what? If in a population of 1.21 billion (2011 census), 7 out of every 10 Indians live in villages, and if easily accessible education (via entertainment and songs) for rural folks is one of the pillars of MGR's policy in his movies, then one cannot find fault with this approach of

MGR. The recent statistics on Indian population living in villages is available in infographic form at the Hindu (Chennai) website. Pandian had conveniently ignored MGR's other vital focus of his movie characters; (1) no physical or mental violence against women, and (2) no indulgence in smoking or alcoholic drinks. Admittedly, this self-adherence did restrict the roles MGR chose to play, but he was more than satisfied with his choice and was successful in it for almost 30 years as a hero.

MGR's Life with More than One Woman

Additionally, Pandian's peeve on MGR's successful career was that he was a hypocrite. This is because, while MGR's movies preached and valorized (1) ideal family values and chastity for woman, (2) monogamous family, in his real life MGR failed to practice such values. In Pandian's words, "MGR's 'personal' life was quite contradictory to the monogamous familial norms which he time and again preached on the screen. In fact, his real life would, would, within the cultural codes of Tamil society, meet all the requirements of a notorious home-breaker. First of all, he married thrice and was living with his third wife, V.N. Janaki, while his second wife was still alive. Secondly, he married his third wife while her earlier husband was still alive."

I think this is the appropriate juncture to disentangle and discuss MGR's marriages since 1942. It is true that MGR married three times. There was nothing wrong that he married second time in 1942 at the age of 25, following the premature death of his first wife Bhargavi (Thangamani). It was his mother Sathyabama who chose his first and second wives from Kerala state for him, as previously mentioned in Part 6 of this series. MGR's second wife was Sadhanandavathi. In his autobiographical memoirs, MGR had described amply in early 1972, (1) with unusual openness, his marital life with Sadhanandavathi from 1942 until her death in 1962; (2) his relationship with actress V.N. Janaki – how it

began in late 1940s and how he led a ménage a trois life with her, with the consent of his legally married wife during the 1950s.



MGR in Maha Devi (2) movie

*I'll rely on MGR's own descriptions and provide English translation below. One should note that among the four books in English that had appeared, as I had indicated previously in part 7 of this series, only Pandian includes references to MGR's serialized autobiography. This indicates that Pandian was fully aware of the specific details of MGR's married life, as the movie star had described. But, to substantiate his argument, Pandian had ignored the vital details on **why** MGR led the ménage a trois life in 1950s. Furthermore, Pandian also had ignored the situation faced by actress V.N. Janaki in her previous relationship with her then husband Ganapathy Bhat. In my understanding, MGR identifies this guy courteously as 'a sort of guardian' to her.*

Heroine Actress V.N. Janaki (1923-1996)

It becomes important to deduce, when and where this Janaki- Bhat relationship began and how it detached and deteriorated eventually to the satisfaction of Janaki, after she met MGR. In attempting to portray MGR as a 'notorious home breaker', Pandian had ignored the sentiments of Janaki, who had opted to spend the rest of her life with MGR since 1950, at the adult age of 27. Janaki's date of birth is Nov.30, 1923 and she died on May 19, 1996, at the age of 72. As the three principals (MGR, Janaki and Ganapathy Bhat) had died, the only living link currently is J. Surendran, the son of Bhat – Janaki union.

I checked the age background of Surendran, from newspaper reports. It was revealed in a write up on Feb.1, 2004 by P.C.Vinoj Kumar, when he had a copyright law suit case about MGR's autobiography at the Madras High Court, that he was 65 years. This makes Surendran's current age as 75 years, and his birth year can be assumed as 1939. This suggests that Janaki would have given birth to him, when she was only 16 – as a minor. When Janaki got married to Ganapathy Bhat, whether she had parental consent is a moot point. This corroborates with the view point that MGR described the 'individual' who gave trouble to him and Janaki was 'a person like guardian'. It can be assumed that at that age, she wouldn't have entered the cinema field, and Bhat took on the role of 'guardian' for Janaki, when she was a minor. It is plausible to infer that, after 10 years or so, the relationship between Bhat and Janaki might have suffered badly for whatever reason known only to themselves, and Janaki was looking for 'exit' and MGR offered his hands. In the meantime, circumstances and luck had favored Janaki, to become one of the leading heroines Tamil movies by 1948.

In his autobiography, MGR had acknowledged the following facts. (1) He first saw Janaki's face in the movie, Thiyagi(The Donor, released in August 1947). And it strongly reminded him of his late first wife, Bhargavi. (2) Janaki had higher earnings from movie roles in late

1940s, compared to him. (3) In a court case to detach herself from the tentacles of her 'guardian', then prominent Tamil movie personalities K. Subramaniam (director), S.S. Vasan (producer/director) and S.D. Subbulakshmi (heroine) either supported Janaki or offered evidence on behalf of her. (4) Though she had higher earnings from movie roles compared to him, Janaki was more than willing to quit acting and continue her life in a legally unsanctioned role as a 'partner' ['thunaiivi' is the Tamil word used] of MGR, and she did so to prove her love and alliance to MGR.

Six of the notable movies V.N. Janaki starred in late 1940s were, Ayiram Thalai Vankiya Apurva Sinthamani (1947), Thiyagi (1947), Raja Mukthi (1948), Chandralekha (1948), Mohini (1948), and Velaikari (1949). Among these, she paired with MGR in Mohini. Artistically most successful was Velaikari (The Servant Girl), a paradigm-shifter in Tamil movies, scripted by MGR's mentor C.N. Annadurai. Popularly most successful was Chandrakekha (1948), produced by mogul S.S. Vasan, at the then most expensive cost of 3,000,000 rupees for an Indian movie. The first and third movies listed, though not featuring MGR, had MGR's elder brother Chakrapani in star listing.

MGR's version of his marriage with Sadhanandavathi

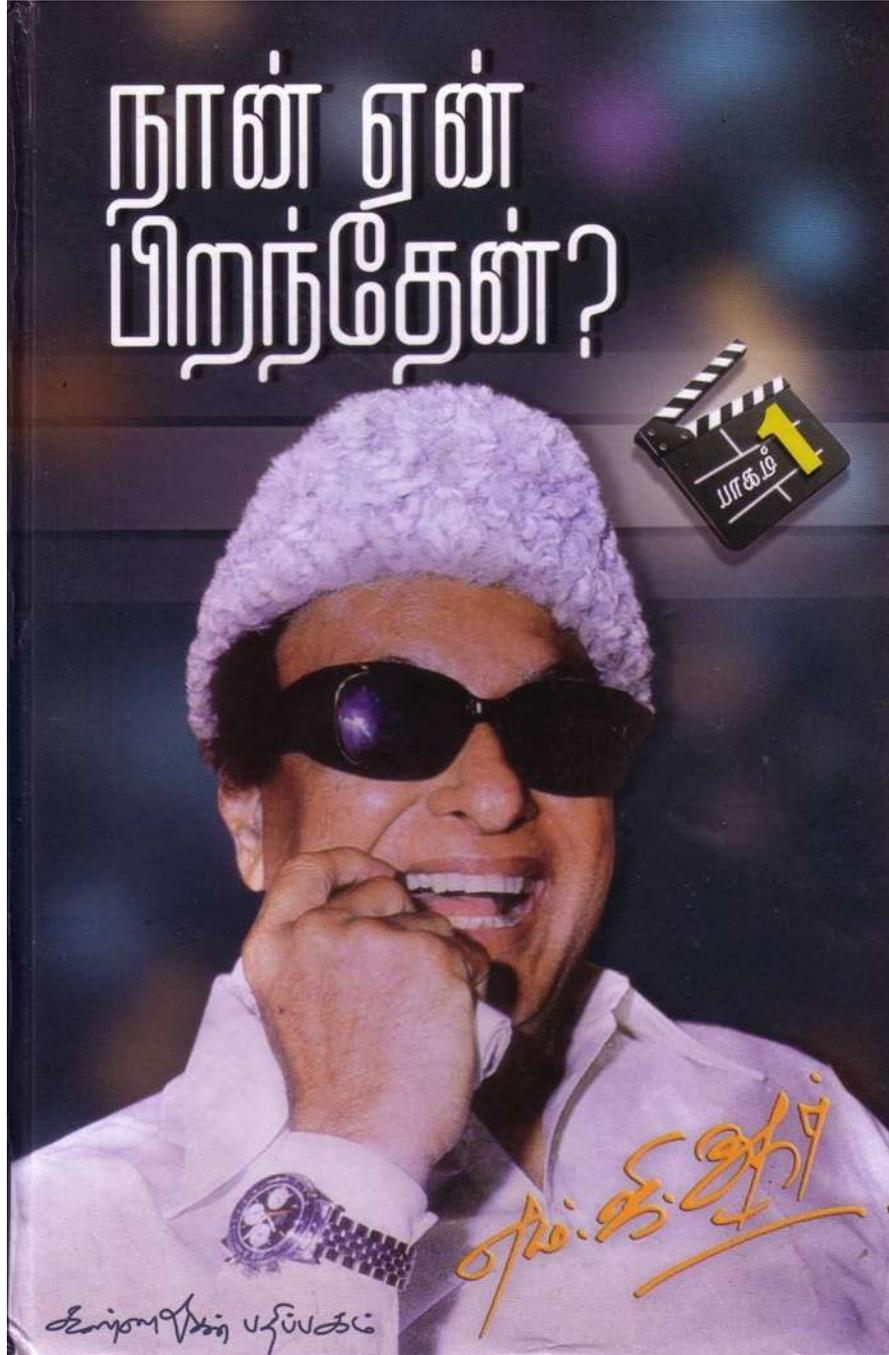
Though MGR did not mention the year of his marriage to Sadhanandavathi, it could be deduced circumstantially that the marriage probably took place in 1942, immediately following the death of his first wife. At that time, he was 25 years old. It could be guessed that his wife would have been younger to him. Chapters 100, 101 and 104 of MGR's memoirs offer rich details. Reminiscing about this life 30 years later, when he was 55, one could feel the distress he had to endure in his professional circles about being issueless. There were circumstances that MGR had to endure behind-the-back gossip and ridicule in the print media about his virility and inability to produce an

offspring in real life, though he projected a macho image in the screen. Here are MGR's reminiscences in chapter 100, with the caption 'I'm Your Wife' – the words of Sadhanandavathi to him.

“My mother had a strong wish that I should have a child. As I was unlucky not to have one with my first wife, my mother wished that I should have one with Sadhanandavathi. While noticing that she was weak, one day my mother took her to a doctor and requested to give an injection to her to retrieve her health. The doctor had given an injection, without examining wife's body status. The result turned out to be horrible. In reality, Sadhanandavathi had conceived. But, because of shyness and immaturity, she couldn't express it openly. Severity of injection had caused miscarriage. How much wish my mother had about me having a child, the opposite turned out as a result. Since then, Sadhanandavathi's health was affected badly.”

MGR continues further. “She was taken to her native village, and given ayurvedic treatment... When she returned to Chennai later, her condition had worsened... At the insistence of elder brother Chakrapani, we took her for medical consultation. Then, we received the bad news. That was, she was at the early stages of tuberculosis (TB). Lungs had been affected. In those days [circa early 1940s], TB was considered as an incurable disease and, it could be easily infected to others. It was told that, no curative drugs were available.”

As I had mentioned at the ending of the previous part, to celebrate the memory of MGR, Kannadasan Pathippagam (publishers) had released MGR's autobiography on January 17th of this year – to coincide with MGR's 97th birthday. Thus, it is opportune to offer a review of two volumes here. There is no doubt that the two volumes of this autobiography is a manna for millions of MGR's fans.



MGR Autobiography Part 1 Front Cover

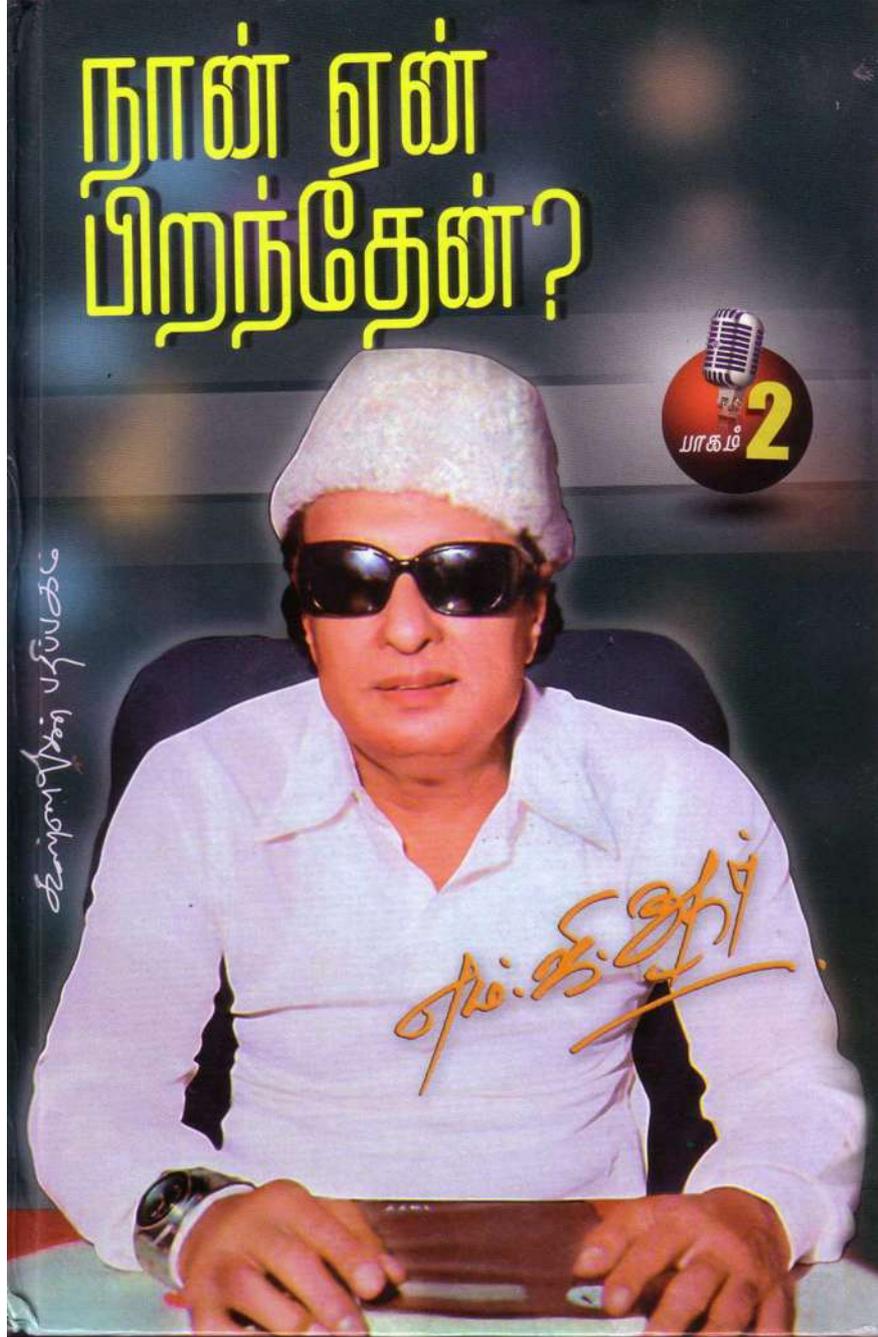
MGR's autobiography was first serialized in Ananda Vikatan Tamil weekly between early 1970 and October 1972. At that time, MGR had passed 50, and was 53 to 55 years old. When he stopped the series immediately after inaugurating his new political party Anna DMK, his

117th movie 'Idaya Veenai' had been released in October 1972. He still had to release 16 more movies between 1973 and January 1978. Now, 26 years after MGR's death, and 44 years after its first serialized publication, his autobiography sees the light. It had a sort-of 'aborted release' in 2003, and ran into copyrights trouble and a Court Case between cousins. One party was V.N. Janaki's son Surendran. The other party was, Sudha Vijayakumar (a daughter of V.N. Janaki's sibling, and one of the three adopted daughters of MGR).

A Synopsis of the Copyright Infringement Case on the Autobiography

Though MGR retained the exclusive copyright of what appeared in the Ananda Vikatan weekly, his registered will dated January 18, 1987, excluded the copyright of the material that appeared in the Ananda Vikatan. After his death, V.N. Janaki acquired the rights as MGR's nearest kin. Though she also prepared her will, the copyright of MGR's autobiography material was excluded in it too. When Janaki died in 1996, none took the trouble to bother about the copyright status of MGR's autobiography. Then, Janaki's niece Sudha Vijayakumar took it upon herself to print 1,000 copies in 2003. According to a report that appeared under a byline of P.C. Vinoj Kumar in Feb.1, 2004, in the copyright infringement case filed by Janaki's son Surendran at the Madras High Court that asked for a restrain order, it was revealed that among the 1,000 copies printed by Rajarajan Pathipagam (Chennai), only 50 copies were sold to the public. Another 18 copies were passed to the media and an additional 17 copies were sold at a Salem book fair. Sudha Vijayakumar had received 100 copies. This makes up to 185 copies. It was also mentioned by Vinoj Kumar that 723 copies were 'in the process of binding'. Cumulatively, it adds up to 908 copies. Remaining 92 copies were seized by P. Nallathai, an advocate commissioner in late January 2004! In Feb. 2008, Surendran also filed a contempt petition No.330 of 2004, at Madras High Court, against Mrs. Sudha Vijayakumar, M. Nandan (proprietor, Rajarajan Pathipagam) and R. Radhakrishnamoorthy (Managing Director, New Century Book

House, Chennai). It stated that while the Court had passed an order of injunction on Jan.21, 2004, the book in question was sold at New Century Book House at Coimbatore. Finally, in June 21, 2012, Justice P.R.Shivakumar had ruled that J. Surendran is the “absolute and exclusive owner of the entire copyright of M.G. Ramachandran’s autobiography ‘Naan Yaen Piranthaen’ – Why I was Born.” Subsequently, poet Kannadasan’s publisher-son Gandhi had negotiated terms with Surendran to publish the autobiography under his Kannadasan Pathippagam label.



MGR autobiography Part 2 Front Cover

Volume 1 of MGR's autobiography, completing the first 63 chapters extends for 719 pages, with supplemented photos. Volume 2, picking up from chapter 64, continues until 1480 pages (also with more photos) and ends with chapter 134. Final 8 pages are supplemented with photos from Surendran's family album and some notable personalities with whom

MGR interacted. The merit of this autobiography lies on the fact that it is a reasonably uncontested record of Tamilnadu's stage drama history from circa 1925 to 1960 and Tamil movie industry from mid 1930s to 1960 by one who was a primary participant-observer to the changing trends and the careers of notable and colorful personalities stage and cinema. There have been other books published by indigenous and foreign scholars on Tamilnadu's stage and movie industry, but none can compete with the weight, longevity, respect and popular fame, MGR carried for his contributions to these fields. MGR recounts his association with elite stage and cinema actors, some of whom served as his mentors – Kali N. Ratnam, M.K. Radha, M.R. Radha, K.P. Kesavan, N.S. Krishnan, P.U. Chinappa, T.S. Balaiah, K.R. Ramasamy, M.N. Nambiar, and last but not the least, his own elder brother M.G. Chakrapani. Other noteworthy individuals belonging to Tamil stage and cinema who also have received mention include (in alphabetical listing) script writer and mentor C.N. Annadurai, actress-singer U.R. Jeevaratnam, actor-lyricist K.P. Kamatchi, lyricist Kannadasan, script-writer M. Karunanidhi, legendary stage singer S.G. Kittappa, lyricist C.A. Lakshmana Das, lyricist Muthukoothan, actor M.G. Nadaraja Pillai, actor D.V. Narayanaswamy, director P. Neelakandan, actor K.K. Perumal, stage-cinema actor S.V. Sahasranamam, director A.S.A. Samy, cinema pioneer Raja Sandow, heroine B. Saroja Devi, stage pioneer T.K. Shanmugam, producer Sandow M.M. A. Sinnappa Devar, producer M. Somasundaram, music director S.M. Subbiah Naidu, director K. Subramaniam, singer-actress K.B. Sundarambal, movie mogul S.S. Vasam and actor P.G. Venkatesan. This is only a select list.

Psychoanalyst Eric Erikson (1902-1992) identified eight stages of human life in 1950, as follows:

Stage 1: Infancy stage (age 0-2)

Stage 2: Early Childhood stage (age 2-4)

Stage 3: Play stage (age 4-5)

Stage 4: School stage (age 5-12)

Stage 5: Adolescence stage (age 13-19)

Stage 6: Young adulthood stage (age 20-39)

Stage 7: Adulthood stage (age 40-64)

Stage 8: Old Age stage (age >65)

MGR's autobiography spans from Erikson stages 2 to 7, with stage 7 stopping at age 55. Among my readings, as of now there has been only three solid autobiographies with 'meat' in Tamil written by those who were trained in the Dravidian tradition and politics. These were, poet Kannadasan (2 volumes), MGR (2 volumes) and script writer-lyricist Karunanidhi (4 volumes, as of now). Kannadasan died in 1981 at the age of 54. MGR died in 1987 at the age of 70. Karunanidhi is still living, and will reach 90, in June 3rd this year. In book versions, Kannadasan's autobiography was first published in 1962. Karunanidhi's autobiography was first published in 1975. MGR's autobiography sees light only this year. What is significant in MGR's autobiography is, it is more self-introspective in details in family relationships, compared to other two. While Kannadasan's autobiography was indeed self-introspective as per personal foibles and deeds, compared to that of Karunanidhi, but his autobiography begins at Ericson stage 5; he had tactfully hidden his relationships with his two wives. MGR was more open in his relationships with his wives compared to Kannadasan and Karunanidhi.

In chapter 1, MGR writes, "The instruments that I've carried in my past life struggles are patience, self-confidence and courage. These three traits have helped me always. But, I cannot answer whether I've achieved completeness in handling these character traits. Why I came to write my autobiography was my focus that others have to be blessed fully with these three character traits.

The primary focus of this self-introspective autobiography was on four women who shaped MGR's life; namely, his mother Sathyabama, and three wives (Bhargavi, Sadanandavathi and V.N. Janaki). True to his life conviction, MGR had given prominence to these four women who had shaped his life and thoughts. Mother Sathyabama was his life guard (and God) and disciplinarian until her death in 1952. There is a delight for many readers, including this reviewer, when reading young MGR's interactions with his mother, even though occasionally he had to disagree with her – but never disobeyed her. Apart from these four, three more women characters did play notable roles in young MGR's life. Two are identified by name. These being, his second mother-in-law Mookambikai (shortened to Mookami; mother of 2nd wife Sadanandavathi) and actress S.D. Subbulakshmi (and wife of director K. Subramaniam). But, my favorite woman character was MGR's first love, who had not been identified by name but lived as his neighbor. Suppose if this woman is still living, she may be 93-94 years old!

First Love

MGR tells the story of his first love humorously in chapters 69 and 73, which had to end in disaster due to the disciplinary actions of his mother. When he was around 15 (circa 1932), he was playing lead roles in a popular stage drama 'Sathiawan-Savithri'. His love interest was next door Tamil girl, aged around 12 or 13. To attract her attention, each morning he would sit with a harmonium and sing repeatedly with elaborative improvisations only the first two lines of the song which is sung by the hero Sathiawan's character.

“Yeno Yenai ezuppalaanai – mada mane

Enakathanai uraikkavenum isaithu ketpaen naane”

are the 'pick up' lines of MGR's heart. In translation, it reads 'Why did you wake me up a timid deer – You'd tell me, I'd plead with you dear'. Teenage MGR's ploy of practicing his drama song lines couldn't fool his

disciplinarian mother. Her morning prayers were disturbed badly by our hero's 'pick-up line' song and the harmonium box sound. One day, she took prompt action, and dumped a bucket of cold water on him. What MGR had described, is as follows:

“ ‘What is this nonsense song you are singing? Especially when young girls are around here? If I hear you singing this song in this house, that's the end. If you want to practice, go to a sea beach and sing any damn thing! If anyone gives you something, why not take it?... What nonsense – why you wake me up? You are the one who is waking everyone here?’ She told this and kicked the harmonium box and went to take her bath! ”

As MGR humorously recollects, his main concern then was not that he was showered by cold bath, but that whether his love interest shouldn't have watched it! Later, our still love-lorn hero adopted another ruse. His friends advised MGR to write a letter. He was scared, ‘Suppose what happens, if it lands in someone else's hand?’ Even for this, his friends prepared an escape route. What MGR did was to tear an end of a newspaper, and scribbled, “When it is feasible to talk [with you]?” The letter(?) was only that much. He had grabbed her hand when she came out, and pressed it into her palms. First time, she didn't accept it. Our love-lorn hero still persisted. Next time, he repeated the act, and succeeded. Her hands were shaking. Then, he was awaiting for a reply from her for that one line question, which never came! Few days later, unexpectedly, an opening gambit arrived. Our hero holds her hand firmly and asks, “Why no reply?” To this, she quietly responded, “Leave my hands! Someone may look badly on us.” and released her hands and left. As she hadn't screamed or made any noise, our hero inferred, “She's willing...but scared. Poor soul”. I stop here about what happened to MGR's first love, because I don't wish to spoil the interest of the readers.

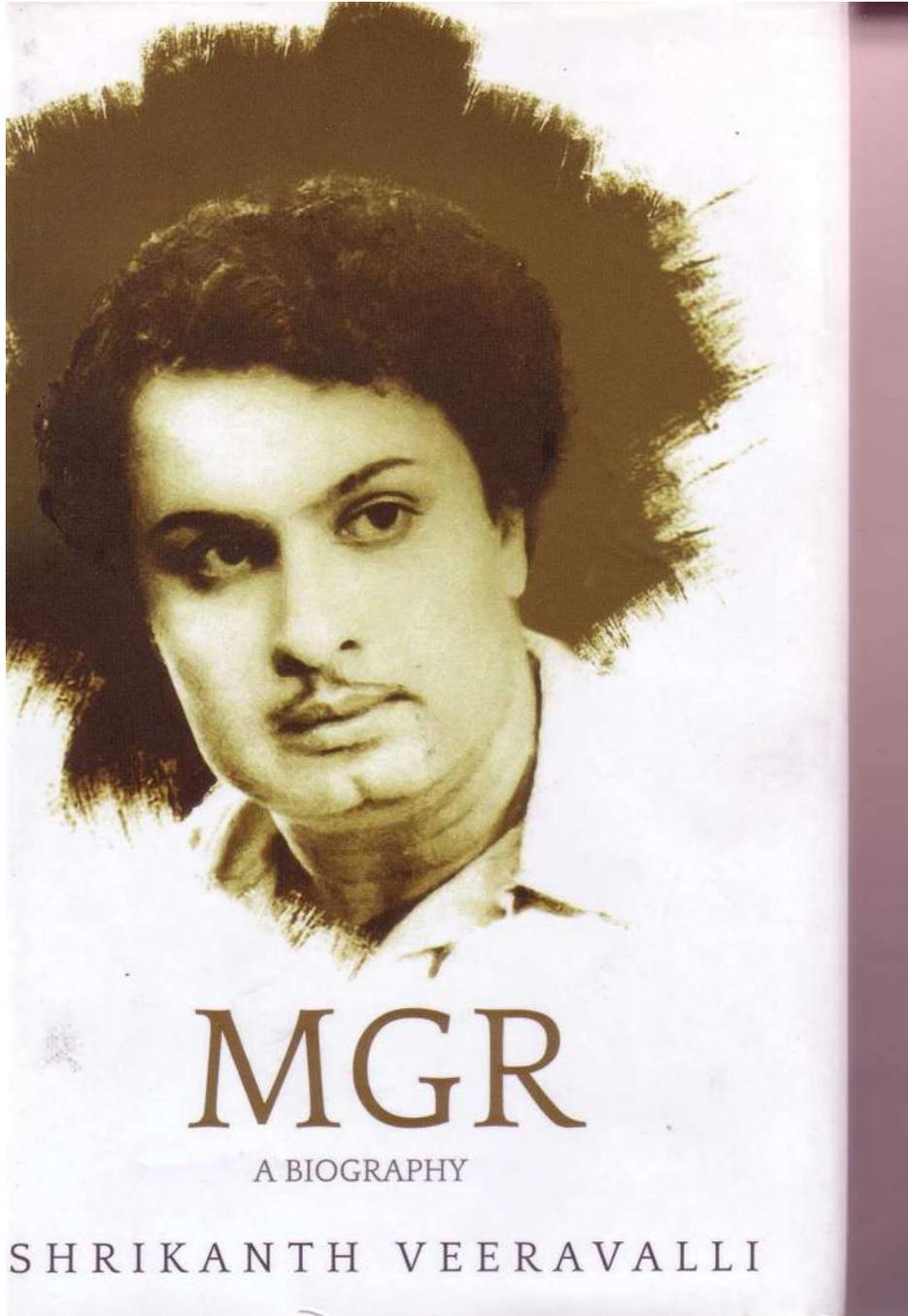
Movie Arena

Here is MGR's thoughts as a movie actor. "This cinema film is mysterious, but at the same time has a dangerous trait too. If it is incomplete, or even if completed but not released, even if it had gulped hundreds of thousands [rupees] in production, it will be considered only as a 'celluloid', but not given any recognition. Only when a film is completed and released, it receives recognition." Having entered the Tamil cinema at the age of 16 or 17 (circa 1933-34), MGR had his share of not-completed movies. The first one which receives recognition in his autobiography was 'Chaaya' in which he was first featured as a hero, around 1941-42. Though he had completed 7 movies by then in subsidiary roles, the last one was Ashokumar, starring the then singing superstar M.K.Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, he became dejected that he couldn't gain the hero role. He writes, "I lost self-confidence that I'll not get a hero chance and was aiming to join the army at the monthly salary of 125 rupees. Then, I was offered a hero role [in Chaaya movie] at the monthly salary of 350 rupees plus sundry expenses 35 rupees to a total of 385 rupees". As fate would have it, this movie was not completed, and MGR had to wait for another five years, for the hero role. While struggling to get work, in combination with personal life troubles of losing his young first wife and a misunderstanding caused by locating a half-empty brandy bottle at his house, MGR also had suicidal thoughts in early 1940s, which he unabashedly includes. Telling this episode also focuses on MGR's dedication to alcohol prohibition in his life.

Though he had completed 117 movies by the time when this autobiography came to an abrupt stop in late 1972, among these movies, MGR specifically focus on 4 movies in which he starred as a hero. These four were, Rajakumari(The Princess, 1947), Maruthanattu Ilavarasi (The Princess of Marutha Land, 1950), Genoa (Genoa, 1953) and Thirudathe (Do Not Steal, 1961). Of course, he does includes some episodes from his other movies too, but probably he learnt more lessons from these four movies for elevating his professional career.

While knowing his strengths in climbing the ladder to success in movies, MGR was also aware about his weakness too. One issue, which receive repetitive mention was his lack of singing ability. From 1930s to early 1950s, until paradigm shift occurred in Tamil movies due to powerful script writing by DMK literati (Annadurai and Karunanidhi), MGR couldn't rise above the then dominant 'singing stars'. Even though, P.U. Chinappa, one of his mentors and a reputed singing star of that era, encouraged MGR to sing in movies with the words that 'You had already sung in stages, and singing in cinema was not that demanding unlike doing a musical performance', MGR knew his limits and tactfully never indulged in this vanity for his movies. Thus, for all his movies, a 'play back' singer was needed. Curiously, I found no mention about any of the play back singers (M.M. Mariappa, Tiruchi Loganathan, C.S. Jayaraman, Sirkazhi Govindarajan, A.M. Rajah, T.M. Soundararajan and S.P. Balasubramaniam) who had lent their voices to MGR, in this autobiography.

Of course, there are some notable omissions. I can identify two. First, lack of details on the shooting incident involving M.R. Radha on January 12, 1967, in which MGR nearly lost his life. He does mentions about his debilitations following that incident. Secondly, no mention about his visit (with actress B. Saroja Devi) to his land of birth, the then Ceylon in late 1965.



In the previous chapter (Part 17), I reviewed MGR's two volume autobiography. To this chapter, I received the following comment from my long standing friend Prof. Sundaram Gunasekaran of University of Wisconsin, Madison. His thoughts were as follows: "Very interesting, especially the story of his [MGR's] first love. You mention of two omissions in his biography; I can think of a third one – Jaya[lalitha]. After her historic win today, I must admit that she has bettered her so-called mentor, at least has benefited the most with the use of MGR name." My reply to Guna was as follows: "To answer your question, Jaya do not appear in MGR's autobiography at all (when he wrote it between 1970-72), except one passing mention – in which MGR had noted, that her mother Sandya was drinking whiskey (as he heard from one of his retainers), when they used his make-up room! He was somewhat irritated by that, because if others (media folks) had come to know that an empty bottle was found in his make-up room, they may falsely accuse him of using alcoholic drink!!! MGR don't mention Jaya's name. He mentions that when he was acting in 'Kannan En Kathalan' [Kannan is My Lover, 1968] movie. And Jaya was the heroine of that movie.

In this chapter, I review two more MGR-related books, which had been published in 2013. One is in Tamil, the other one is in English. The book in English, entitled 'MGR a biography' was by Shrikanth Veeravalli (curiously, my namesake, with a variant English spelling). It is of only 145 pages. The second book in Tamil, entitled 'Naan Aanayittal...Ponmana Chemmalin Pokkisham' [If I give Command...Treasure from the Golden Hearted] was edited by S. Kirubakaran. It is of 256 pages. Among the two, the latter one is worthy of attention for the sole reason that it is a compilation of the text materials of 41 documents related to MGR; his speeches in public meetings, radio /TV, as well as written essays/articles/commentaries published previously in journals devoted to Tamil films and Tamil politics.

First to Shrikanth Veeravalli's biography. In a previous chapter, I had compared the merits and demerits of four MGR biographies published in English. This new addition to 'MGRiana' appears to be a cut and paste, quicky product by a first time author. The inside cover blurb, introduces the author as "A senior management professional SHRIKANTH VEERAVALLI obsessively creates time for his hobbies and other pursuits. His interests span a wide spectrum: from movies to music, from cooking to books. History and crime fiction are among his favourite literary genres. He loves all things associated with words – whether it is reading or writing, solving or setting cross-word puzzles, listening or speaking. He has recently been empanelled as a crossword compiler for The Hindu, and plans to produce a lot of written work in the future. Brought up on a steady dose of Tamil movies, he thinks it is only natural that MGR is the subject of his first book."

*I have reason to include this 109 word profile of the author here, because it indicates some details about the personality of the author. I like the description, "He loves all things associated with words". He loves words so much, that he incorporates what had been written by other authors, into his own corpus! He also doesn't keep proper records of what he borrows, and from whom he had borrowed the ideas or words. He also doesn't believe in the convention of giving due credit to other authors' ideas. I have been chronicling MGR's life for the past 26 years, after his death. My writings had appeared in print and electronic versions. As such, it is obvious that Veeravalli was influenced by my writings. To his credit, Veeravalli do mention my name and my thoughts about MGR twice in his book (between pages 96 and 97, **and** 140). What is presented between pages 96 and 97 about my reasons on why only MGR (among all other Tamil Nadu politicians) came to take the Eelam issue to his heart, I do acknowledge as my true comments. They appeared in my short collection of essays and articles, entitled, 'MGR Movies Revisited: and other Essays (1995). But, what is presented in page 140, I have not written at all. It was a surprise to me, when I read it!*



Kirubakaran book cover

To quote Veeravalli, "As Sachi Sri Kantha wrote in his obituary for MGR, 'In the eyes of the common people, the chief minister became indistinguishable from the generous-hearted, larger-than-life heroes he

portrayed on screen. Few understood that his welfare schemes, however well-intentioned, were at the expense of developing the state's infrastructure. Under MGR, Tamil Nadu slipped from second to tenth place among India's twenty-five states in industrialization.' ” Two pertinent issues here. First, I never wrote an obituary to MGR, after he died in December 1987! Secondly, what was passed by Veeravalli, as I had written, are not my thoughts and words. If he had cited a source from which he had gathered this bit of trivia, it may clarify the issue. This illustrates the problem of 'copying and pasting' indulged by some first time authors. And to think, that Veeravalli is now serving as a “crossword compiler for The Hindu” tells something about the journalistic practices of that publishing company. Another issue with author Veeravalli is, he had snatched my idea in explaining MGR's political concept of Annaism, as his own, **without due attribution of credit**. To this website, I contributed an essay, 'On Milton Friedman, MGR & Annaism' in November 25, 2006, as a requiem to the celebrated American economist. In this book, Veeravalli passes this idea, as his own by re-arranging the words, as follows: “Milton Friedman, the 1976 Nobel Prize winner for economics, stated that even the US was 45 percent socialist, suggesting that socialism and capitalism could co-exist. Whether MGR understood what Friedman meant or not, it is possible that this was a utopian dream of his, and when articulated by him found supporters too.” (p. 64) Similarly, I also noticed that few of my 1992 thoughts expressed on MGR's birth in Kandy, repackaged as his own!

In sum, this short biography is split into 5 parts; part 1 (1917-49), part 2 (1949-1972), part 3 (1972-1977), part 4 (1980-87) and part 5 (1987-forever). 15 chapters are contained in these 5 parts. MGR's interest in the Eelam issue is covered in one of these 15 chapters, basically from Anton Balasingham's book on LTTE's interactions with MGR. Unfortunately, MGR's career in stage and movies get short shrift. MGR's tiffs with comedian J.P. Chandrababu, villain and character actor M.R. Radha, and director C.V. Sridhar are passingly noted. The only redemption seems to be, that author had begun each of the 15

chapters with a lyric from MGR's movie, except the penultimate chapter entitled 'Ascent Jayalalitha'. For this particular chapter, a lyric from a Jayalalitha movie (Sooriyakanthi, aka sunflower; a movie without MGR in it) is included. Overall, MGR's political career is predominantly covered in this book. Details from the books of MGR's two previous biographers Attar Chand, K. Mohan Das are passingly cited. At the end, Veeravalli cites Shakespeare's line for Marc Antony, "Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?" and paraphrases it to MGR's life as, "One is just tempted to end the narration by saying, 'Here was MGR! When comes such another!'" Lack of an index is a demerit.

One particular issue about MGR's interaction with the then popular director C.V. Sridhar in 1960s, recollected by Veeravalli deserves expose. I quote the specific sentences that appear in page 45. "Sridhar was a very famous director during the late '60s and early '70s. He holds the credit for introducing Jayalalitha in movies. He once signed up MGR and the shoot started. It was a story designed for MGR, but somewhere along the line, differences cropped up between him and MGR. When MGR suggested that a scene be changed as his fans would not accept him in that situation, Sridhar shot back that it was not an MGR movie but a Sridhar movie. In 1968, it was blasphemy to speak like that to MGR. MGR walked out of the movie and it was made later with Sivaji in the lead and the title was of Sivantha Mann. It was the first film to be shot outside the country in Switzerland. The movie bombed and Sridhar was neck deep in debt. He could not find help anywhere when someone suggested that he meet MGR. Sridhar was aghast at that advice. He felt that he did not have the face to meet MGR again let alone seek help. But the friend insisted and, and after much hesitation, Sridhar went to meet MGR. MGR heard out his problem and chided him for not coming earlier."

I'd say that Veeravalli's account of MGR-Sridhar interaction in 1960s is merely hearsay! He should have checked the original sources. Though MGR had not recorded it in his autobiography, director C.V. Sridhar (1933-2008), to his credit, had recorded it posterity in his

memoirs, 'Thirumbi Parkiren' (Looking Back), which appeared in 2002. This was 15 years after MGR's death. And Sridhar was under no obligation to protect MGR's image or hurt his feelings! Sridhar mentions that he called MGR on phone and the latter asked him to visit his house. At MGR's house, Sridhar requested MGR to act in one of his movies, which he would direct. After he told the story, 'Andru Sinthiya Ratham' [The Blood that was spilled Then], MGR listened to it and accepted to act with the quip, 'Good Story. My character seems excellent.' Then, Sridhar was so pleased and requested MGR to give call sheets, according to his convenience. For formality, he also was about to hand in 25,000 rupees as advance, MGR told him to hand it to his elder brother Chakrapani. After having the pooja[prayers] for the movie shooting, MGR offered call sheet for 2-3 days. The scene was, MGR making a forceful speech in front of around 400 youngsters. For this, Sridhar had arranged to receive students from many colleges in the city. The shooting of this scene was over. That's all. After that, MGR didn't give any call sheets. Now, I provide, Sridhar's words in translation, in which he acknowledges his mistake in dealing with MGR. Sridhar had written,

“After that, we had met on so many occasions. But, both of us never talked about the stopped 'Andru Sinthiya Ratham'. However, he behaved very kindly with me. Later only, I realized why MGR didn't give call-sheet for my movie. This is it. I had promoted two movies, 'Andhru Sinthiya Ratham' and 'Kaathalika Neramillai' [No Time to Make Love] at the same time, on the same day in advertisements of a journal back to back. In it, I had inserted that 'Kaathalika Neramillai' was a color film. But no such announcement was made for the 'Andhru Sinthiya Ratham'. MGR would have got upset [that's the exact word, Sridhar had used within inverted commas.] after looking these advertisements. My impression then was that, as MGR himself was a 'colorful' personality, his movie need not be in color. Thus, I had decided 'no color' for this movie. My mistake was that, if I had talked with MGR and obtained his approval, he'd have agreed to my thinking. Without me doing that, once he saw back-back promotional announcements for two movies, he would

have got upset that I'm down-grading his status in comparison to that of new faces."

In fact, 'Kathalika Neramillai' was a hugely successful comedy movie made in Eastman color, in which Sridhar had introduced new faces Ravichandran and Kanchana to Tamil films. It was released in February 1964. It also benefitted from excellent performances by veteran T.S. Baliah, comedian Nagesh and supporting hero Muthuraman. It is interesting to check that Sridhar's account of his mistake, contradicts the dateline given by Veeravalli, who places the rift between MGR and Sridhar in 1968. The promotional advertisement which Sridhar mentions should have appeared in late 1963. 'Sivantha Mann' movie was taken in both Tamil and Hindi. It was released in 1969. Sridhar records that its collection in Tamil version was good, but it's Hindi version flopped badly. To re-gain the lost money, Sridhar gambled again in taking another Tamil and Hindi movie of the same story, 'Avalukku Endru Oru Manam' [A Mind of Her Own, 1971]. Even, Hindi version of this movie flopped in box office. The Tamil version was accepted with mediocre collection. Then, he produced another movie, Alaigal [Waves, 1973]. It also bombed, and increased his debts! Then, Sridhar wanted to take a Sivaji Ganesan movie with the title, 'Hero 72' in Tamil and Hindi versions. He was able to complete the Hindi version, with Jithendra in time, but Sivaji Ganesan refused to give call sheets to complete the movie. It was only then with neck deep in debt, Sridhar was forced to approach MGR. Veeravalli mentions that "someone suggested that" Sridhar should meet MGR. If he had really read Sridhar's 2002 memoirs, he'd have known the identity of that 'someone'. It was none other than popular Hindi actor Rajendra Kumar of 1960s, who himself had acted in Sridhar's Hindi movies. I provide these nitty-gritty details recollected by Sridhar to show that Veeravalli's version is utterly unreliable.



MGR Movies Revisited:
and Other Essays

SACHI SRI KANTHA

If Veeravalli's biography is a disappointment, Kirubakaran's compilation of MGR's public documents which remained scattered in various Tamil magazines (Ananda Vikatan, Nadihan Kural, Sama Neethi, Bhommai, Filimalaya, Murasoli, Thirai Ulagam, Pesum Padam, Thenral Thirai, Manramand Mathi Oli) and special publications

such as 'Nadodi Mannan' movie felicitation souvenir, is a pleasurable treat to have in one's book shelf. Mr. Shanmughasundaram Mohan (b. 1930), Ex- Supreme Court Justice of India, had written an encouraging forward to this book. 41 documents assembled in this book, spans the period from 1948 to 1982. Among these 41 documents, quite a few reveal MGR's inner thoughts on Tamil cinema and Tamil Nadu politics. In my choice ranking, MGR's essay on the popular success of his first production, Nadodi Mannan (Vagabond and the King, 1958) spans 36 pages. In it, MGR had detailed the contributions of script writers (poet Kannadasan, Ravindar), actors (P.S.Veerappa, M.G. Chakrapani, M.N. Nambiar, T.K. Balachandran, K.R. Ramsingh, J.P. Chandrababu), actresses (P. Bhanumathi, M.N. Rajam, G. Sakuntala, B. Saroja Devi, T.P. Muthulakshmi), dancer (Chandra), lyricists (N.M. Muthukoothan, Suradha, Athmanathan, Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram, Lakshmana Das), musical directors (N.S.Balakrishnan, S.M. Subbiah Naidu), story department of MGR Pictures (R.M. Veerappan, Vidwan V. Lakshmanan, S.K.T. Sami, stuntmen and trainers (R.N. Nambiar), technicians (Ramu, Menon), editors (Perumal, Jambu), executive (Govindarajan), makeup man (Rangasamy), studio mogul Nagi Reddy, and last but not the least, director K. Subramaniam who served as a supervisor for MGR's direction. He also corrected the false impression spread around that time, that this particular movie was an adaption of Hollywood movie The Prisoner of Zenda (1937), starring Ronald Colman. MGR states in the article that in their first promotional announcement, they themselves had mentioned this fact. But, subsequently, the story lines changed and another Ronald Colman movie, 'If I were a King' (1938) that attracted his attention around 1937-1938 when he was filming his fifth movie in Calcutta – Maya Machindra, came to his focus, and it came to be adapted. MGR continues further that he was bothered with poverty in the land and when he discussed this question within his circle, the only answer he received was that, poverty exists because of foreigner's rule. At that time, India was a colony of British. But, he came to realize later that even after Independence, poverty problem continued to exist. Thus, he yearned for a 'good rule' (which he calls, Nal(la) Aatchi). Until, this is not settled, poverty cannot be eliminated. Thus, he

introduced the vagabond character in the movie. MGR mentions the cost for producing this Nadodi Mannan (released in August 1958) was 1,800,000 Indian rupees. In a 1962 speech, made at a function to felicitate MGR's election to the Upper House of the Madras Legislative Assembly, MGR offers the figure of 1,300,000 rupees that was spent in producing the Sivaji Ganesan starrer, Veera Pandiya Kattabhomman (released in May 1959).

Another interesting, lengthy address (29 pages) of MGR that appears as the last item of this book, was his 'Thank You' speech at the felicitation function arranged by the movie world to celebrate his honorary doctorate offered by the University of Madras. In it, he had mentioned that it was he who had recommended Sivaji Ganesan (then known, only as V.C. Ganesan) in 1946 to the role of Anna-scripted 'Sivaji Kanda Indu Samrajyam' or 'Chandramohan' drama as the most suitable actor, after refusing the offer he had in his hand. He mentions that the main reason was, he was pre-occupied with the shooting of his first hero – role movie Rajakumari (1947). He had asserted that this fact was known to actor D.V. Narayanasamy (who arranged with Anna to have MGR for that particular role), director A.S.A. Sami, and also to 'Sivaji' Ganesan.

The book is also supplemented with 60 photos of MGR, some with his contemporaries in movies and politics and some from film stills. It would have been good, if the years in which these photos were taken were clearly annotated. Especially, the cover photo of this book features MGR hugging an aged lady. Late in his years, he had used a white fur cap and dark sunglasses as part of his attire. As he appears in this cover photo without a cap and sunglasses, it is certain that this photo was taken before he turned 50. The contrasts in this black and white close up photo is rather remarkable. Man and Woman, 'young' and aged, 'white' and 'black', smooth skin and wringled skin, 'double chin' and 'single chin', a movie star (without makeup) and a commoner. It is mentioned that the compiler Kirubakaran is a full time journalist at Vikatan group. As Kirubakaran's compilation is a vital source book on MGR, I plan to use materials from this book for future chapters of this MGR's biography.

One merit in writing to the electronic medium is the availability of immediate opportunity to amend and revise previous errors. In Part 17, when I reviewed MGR's two autobiography volumes, I had stated that Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi (a pal turned political foe) had published 4 volumes of his autobiography. Now, I acknowledge this is a factual error. Karunanidhi had added two more volumes to his autobiography, and volumes 5 and 6 were published last year. As such, this part deals with Karunanidhi's version of history. Last June 3rd, he celebrated his 90th birthday; thus, outliving MGR by 20 years, and his mentor Annadurai by 30 years.

Volume 5 of Karunanidhi's autobiography, published in June 2013 (to felicitate his 89th birthday) is a tome of 1,037 pages. It covers the period from 1996 to 1999. He was re-elected to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister position for the 4th time in 1996. Volume 6 of Karunanidhi's autobiography, published in October 2013 contains 551 pages, and ends in May 2003. Karunanidhi delights himself by noting that cumulatively he had written 4,168 pages which covers his life until 2003.

A synopsis of MGR's political career

Was it Amma (aka Jayalalitha) magic or MGR magic? In the recently held India's general election (May 2014), All India Anna DMK, founded by MGR in 1972 (and currently led by his protégé Jayalalitha) made a convincing sweep in Tamil Nadu electorates. It won 37 among the 39 constituencies. It was the first time that the party contested alone, without any seat-sharing arrangement with any other national or regional party. AIADMK whacked convincingly its chief rival DMK party led by Karunanidhi, Sonia-Rahul led Congress Party, Modi-led BJP party and its allies, Vijayakanth-led DMDK party.

Though 26 years had passed since MGR's death, how could one explain the performance and popularity of AIADMK? Many reasons can be cited, which may include, (1) MGR 'vote bank' still remains solid; (2) Jayalalitha was a no-nonsense leader; (3) DMK led by Karunanidhi, with dynastic policies is nauseating to voters; (4) Grand –old Congress

Party is faction ridden, had lost its moorings, and never have a chance of revitalization; (5) It will be tough for BJP (though successful in the North) to root itself in Tamilnadu; (6) Communist Parties, like that of Congress Party, totally lack voter base and voter confidence.

One fact which deserves admiration is that, even after 42 years of its establishment by MGR as an offshoot of DMK party, and 26 years after the death of its founder, that AIADMK should possess some exceptional degree of attachment with Tamilnadu voters to shine so big in this year's general election. This was the party, which was ridiculed as a '100-day movie show', by MGR's political opponents (including Karunanidhi), many media pundits and wags in Tamilnadu, when it was founded. Latest technological advances in media in the past 20 years (computer use, DVDs, cell phones and YouTube) perpetuate MGR's memories via his movies and 'philosophy-packed' songs.



MGR and E.V. Saroja in 'Yen Thangai'

Especially of note was the 60-year old song, 'Ethanai Kaalam Thaan Emarruvaar Intha Naatile?' (How long these guys will be cheating us?). This time-less, meaningful song appeared in the Malai Kallan (Mountain Thief, 1954) movie, in which MGR played the hero.

The song was set in a mountain-range, where MGR was lip-synching the song while accompanying the heroine P. Bhanumathi, seated in a white horse. Though this song's lyricist was Thanjai Ramaiah Das, musically arranged by S.M. Subbiah Naidu and sung by T.M. Soundararajan, it is perpetually identified as MGR's supreme song. Ironically, the script for this movie was written by none other than Karunanidhi. Among the Tamil movie songs, it has a high quotient of You Tube access, for its catchy tune and political meaning for the down-trodden.

A synopsis of the chronological highlights of MGR's political career is given below.

mid 1930s-1947: a sympathizer of pre-independence Congress Party.

1947-1951: Unaffiliated with any party.

1953: formerly joined the DMK party founded by C.N. Annadurai, during its Tiruchi district conference (25-26 April).

1967: elected as a MLA from DMK party.

1968: After Anna's death, was influential in electing M. Karunanidhi as the successor to Anna's vacated chief minister position.

1971: re-elected as a MLA from DMK party.

1972: sacked by the DMK party, led by Karunanidhi; founded his own party,

named Anna DMK; Later, revised the name to All India Anna DMK (AIADMK).

1977: Elected Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, after his AIADMK party was voted to power.

1980 Feb: Ministry dismissed by Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India.

1980 June: AIADMK party elected to power for the second time.

1984 Dec: AIADMK party elected to power for the third time, while MGR was recuperating in Brooklyn Hospital, New York.

1985 Feb: Assumed third consecutive term of Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and held it

until his death in Dec.24, 1987.

MGR's entry into DMK

While checking the progress of MGR's movie career as a hero, after the untimely death of his mentor P.U.Chinnappa in September 1951, he had three movies released in three consecutive months of 1952. These were, Andhaman Kaithi (Anthaman Convict, March 1952), Kumari (Miss, April 1952) and Yen Thangai (My Sister, May 1952). The first two were adopted from stage dramas. It was only in Andhaman Kaithi, that the moniker M.G. Ramachandran came to be used in the title credit. Until then, he had preferred the name M.G. Ramchandrar. All three movies had limited success in box office. Though MGR's performance as the sympathetic brother of a blind girl in Yen Thangai movie was rated highly by the opinion makers, it did not fare well with the public. The script writer for two of the movies was lyricist Ku. Sa. Krishnamurthy. Year 1952 was the water-shed year in Tamil movie history, as Sivaji Ganesan debuted in Parasakthi movie (scripted by Karunanidhi) in October 1952. Two months later, in December of that year, Panam (Money) – a second Sivaji Ganesan and Karunanidhi combination movie – directed by comedian N.S. Krishnan was also released. It was in this movie, Krishnan sang a punning propaganda song 'Theena Moona Kaana' [the Tamil alphabets which tagged the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam – DMK party] written by poet Kannadasan. To escape from the scissors of censor board, the alphabets were superficially tagged to Thirukural Munnetra Kazhagam; 'Thirukural' being the holy book for Tamils.

In hindsight, it is easy to infer the reasons why MGR opted to join the DMK bandwagon in 1953. The factors which could have contributed to his decision include, lack of financial success of his three 1952 movies, a rivalry spirit with Sivaji Ganesan who was younger to him by 11 years, influence of comedian-mentor N.S. Krishnan, previous acquaintance and attraction to Karunanidhi's skills as a talented script writer (since 1947) and influx of other DMK-affiliated talents in the Tamil movie world. Apart from Anna, Karunanidhi and N.S. Krishnan, there were others such as D.V. Narayanasamy, lyricist Kannadasan, script writers A. V.P. Asaithambi and Rama Arangannal. Though MGR himself had tactfully hidden these multiple reasons for his official entry into DMK, and alluded to his chief attraction to Annadurai's books, they seem so obvious. In a photo taken at Sivaji Ganesan's wedding on May 1, 1952, MGR was seen with his DMK contemporaries, before his entry into DMK. Among the seven featured in this photo (from left to right: Rama Arangannal, Sivaji Ganesan, producer of Parasakthi movie P.A. Perumal, lyricist Kannadasan, Karunanidhi, MGR and director A.S.A.Sami), other than Perumal, Sami and MGR, other four were in DMK at that time.



Sivaji Ganesan's wedding day May 1, 1952

MGR's political career had been treated extensively by Robert Hardgrave Jr. in 1960s and 1970s, before MGR assumed the Chief Minister position in 1977. Then, M.S.S. Pandian published his tract on

MGR's politics in 1992, focusing on MGR's politics as the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. Recently, Anna's biographer Kannan had provided excellent details on MGR's affiliation to DMK party, until Anna's death in 1969. As such, I'll not regurgitate the details provided by them.

In my view, Prof. Hardgrave and Pandian had failed to provide proper context to MGR's political career in association with movies, by treating him in isolation, and virtually ignoring the parallel contemporary trends of movie making in Hollywood, Soviet Union, China, and other European countries. MGR's harshest critics were Communist Party sympathizers in India (Chidanand Das Gupta, D. Jayakanthan and Pandian) and Sri Lanka (K. Sivathamby). What I consider appalling is that, these critics of MGR never ever focused their eyes on how movies were made and promoted in the then Soviet Union and China, and for what purpose movies were used.

1992 Diatribe by an MGR critic (Pandian)

In introducing his tract, 5 years after MGR's death, Pandian offered the following criticism. I provide an unabridged entire paragraph:

"I am one among those many – both within and outside the state of Tamilnadu – who have been puzzled and pained by MGR's unparalleled political success. His eleven year rule (1977-87) was undoubtedly on of the darkest periods in the contemporary history of the state. Under his dispensation, profiteers of different kinds – liquor barons, real estate magnates, and the ubiquitous ruling party politicians – greatly prospered while a stagnant, if not declining economy, forced the poor, who constituted the mainstay of MGR's support, into unbearable misery. And the well-honed police machinery in Tamilnadu, with its characteristic ruthlessness and MGR's open blessings, snuffed out even the mildest forms of dissent from the working people, whether they were workers, poor peasants or professionals, such as, school teachers and

government employees. His rule also witnessed a considerable dilution of the cultural gains achieved by the subaltern classes in Tamilnadu due to the relentless struggles waged by the Dravidian Movement during its early progressive phase. In place of the earlier rationalism, religious revivalism now reigned supreme. Despite all these drawbacks, MGR and his party enjoyed large-scale support from the subaltern classes. Only his death in 1987 could dislodge him from the centre stage of Tamil politics and give a fresh lease of life to his political opponents. In fact, even death could not undo him fully. Given his continuing popularity, MGR's erstwhile opponents are today inaugurating memorials for him in a desperate bid to win over his supporters to their side. How did MGR succeed the way he did? This study is an effort to unravel the complex terrain of Tamil politics."

Was this a case of 'sour grapes' sentiment? One wonders, how does Pandian feels now (after 22 years) and still MGR's party makes a big splash in the general election held in last May? If Pandian had bothered to study how movies during Stalin era (1930s to 1953) or during the Mao Zedong era (1949 to 1976) were produced, he might have reconciled his pained mind.

Soviet Film under Stalin

For MGR critics like Pandian, I paraphrase the following details offered by Peter Kenez, in the authoritative 'The Oxford History of World Cinema' (1996). I specifically offer six details. According to Peter Kenez,

Item 1: "The Bolsheviks considered film to be an excellent instrument for bringing their message to the people, and they aimed to use it, more than any other artistic medium, for creating the 'new socialist man'."

Item 2: "Socialist Realist novels and films followed a master plot: the hero, under the tutelage of a positive character, a Party leader with well-developed Communist class-consciousness, overcomes obstacles,

unmasks the villain, a person with unreasoned hatred for decent socialist society, and in the process himself acquires superior consciousness – that is, becomes a better person.”

Item 3: “Between 1933 and 1940 inclusive, Soviet studios made 308 films ...Historical spectacles became especially frequent in the second half of the decade, as the regime paid increasing attention to rekindling patriotism by old-fashioned appeals to national glory. These films were made about heroes such as Alexander Nevsky, Peter the Great, or Marshall Suvorov...”

Item 4: “A recurrent theme in films dealing with contemporary life was the struggle against saboteurs and traitors...In more than half the films about contemporary life (fifty two out of eighty five), the hero unmasked hidden enemies who had committed criminal acts. The enemy turned out to be sometimes his best friend, sometimes his wife, and sometimes his father.”

Item 5: “According to official doctrine, it was the script-writer, rather than the director, who was the crucial figure and ultimately responsible. Stalin thought that the director was merely a technician whose only task was to position the camera, following instructions already in the script.”

*Item 6: “From the late 1930s until his death in 1953, Stalin became the supreme censor, who personally saw and approved every film released. Like Goebbels in Nazi Germany, he micromanaged the cinema, suggesting changes in titles, supporting favoured directors and actors, and reviewing scripts. In some politically sensitive films such as Friedrich Ermler’s *The Great Citizen* (*Veliky grazhdanin*, 1939), the changes were substantial and Stalin could be regarded almost as a co-author.”*

Almost all the central tenets of the six items paraphrased above for Soviet films under Stalin, compares favorably with MGR’s ‘politics-tinged’ movies in which he acted as hero since 1950 to 1977. Thus, the question arises, if it was good for Soviet movies to build character

among citizens and develop a strong nation, then what was wrong with MGR's ideas of movies?

Politics in Movies of Other Countries

To study the reality whether Tamilnadu was an exception in using politics in movies, I checked the 'Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide' (1988) prepared by Ronald Bergan and Robyn Karney. It has a selection of over 2,000 movies produced in many countries, 'since the dawn of cinema'. According to the compilers, 'every significant film – classics which have stood the test of time or works that are integral to cinema history – and movies, which, irrespective of quality or current appeal, are representative of trends, fashions, styles and developments' were included in this selection.

I limited my search to movies produced in Soviet Union, China, Germany and France, from 1920s to 1949. The reason being, DMK was founded in 1949, and a myth was spread by early researchers of Tamilnadu politics (especially Eric Barnow and Robert Hardgrave) that DMK party was unique in introducing politics into cinema medium. And this myth had been repeated ad nauseam by later researchers and journalist hacks as well. Here is a select list of political movies from each of these four countries.

Soviet Union

Sergei Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potemkin, 1925).

Vsevolod Pudovkin's Mother (Mat, 1926).

Vsevolod Pudovkin's The End of St.Petersburg (Konyets Sankt-Peterburga, 1927).

Sergei Eisenstein's October (Oktyabr, 1928)

Nicolai Ekk's The Road to Life (Putyovka V Zhizn, 1931)

Sergei Vasiliev & Georgi Vasiliev's Chapayev (Chapayev, 1934).

Friedrich Ermier's Peasants (Krestyaniye, 1935)

Mikhail Romm's Lenin in October (Lenin V Oktiabrye, 1937)

Mark Donskoi's The Childhood of Maxim Gorky (Detstvo Gorkovo, 1938)

Alexander Dovzhenko's Shors (Shchors, 1939)

Mikhail Romm's Lenin in 1918 (Lenin V 1918, 1939)

France

Abel Gance's Napoleon (Napoleon, 1927)

Jean Renoir's The Marseillaise (La Marseillaise, 1938)

G.W.Pabst's The Shanghai Drama (Le Drame de Shanghai, 1938)

Andre Malraux's Man's Hope aka Days of Hope (Espoir aka Sierra de Teruel, 1939)

Rene Clement's Les Maudits (The Damned, 1947)

Germany

*G.W. Pabst's Paracelsus (Paracelsus, 1943) – Nazi Germany's propaganda film using the career of physician-chemist Paracelsus
China*

Zheng Junli's Crows and Sparrows (Wuya Yu Maque, 1949)

Ling Zhifeng's Daughters of China (Zhai Jiang's Zhonghua Nuer, 1949)

*One shouldn't exclude Hollywood movies as well. David Wark Griffith's classic *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, itself was a monumental melodrama of the American Civil War and its aftermath. Now, many movie fans consider this classic as seriously flawed for its anti-Black bias. Then, 25 years later, Charlie Chaplin produced his first talkie, '*The Great Dictator*' (1940), making fun at Adolf Hitler, while he was in power. In between, there had been quite a number of politics-tinged movies produced in Hollywood.*

Politician-Activist Actors in Hollywood

Stephen Ross authored a fascinating portrayal of Hollywood's politician-activist actors in 2011. He identified five Left-leaning actors and five Right-leaning actors in the history of Hollywood. The Left-leaning actors in Ross's list were Charlie Chaplin, Edward G. Robinson, Harry Belafonte, Jane Fonda and Warren Beatty. The Right-leaning actors were, George Murphy, Ronald Reagan, Charlton Heston (moved from Left to Right), and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

According to Ross, political Hollywood started much earlier than most people realize and Charlie Chaplin was the "first major star to use movies as an ideological weapon, and he did so in a way that both amused and politicized audiences." Chaplin's message of mixing politics with humor was adeptly picked up by Tamil movie land's prominent comedian and MGR's contemporary N.S. Krishnan. Whereas Chaplin used mime and his tramp character for his political message, N.S. Krishnan used songs as the prominent medium.

*Eric Barnow (1908-2001), the first American who wrote about MGR's role in his '*Indian Film*' (1963), identified various media in his career such as, 'theater, magazine, radio, pamphlet, advertising, vaudeville, film, classroom, book, song lyric, animated film, video' and inferred poignantly, "media shifts seemed to be power shifts at the heart of modern history". Coming to think of it, other than book and animated film, MGR's movie-political career was enriched by all other media; theater, radio, advertising, film, song lyric, video – you name it! Even in*

the 21st century, computers, DVDs and You Tubes also promote MGR's image prominently. Whether one likes it or not, this may explain the success of his AIADMK party with the Tamilnadu voters in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

Karunanidhi's autobiographical volumes 5 and 6

Though I don't intend to review both volumes, I can only write, that Karunanidhi's autobiography plot is abysmally simple. In all six volumes, the hero was Karunanidhi. The heroine was 'Chief Minister position' of Tamil Nadu. Only the villains change. Then, there are supporting casts for hero, and villain. Into this supporting cast, falls all the other lead players of Tamil Nadu politics (his elders, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, Rajaji, Anna, Kamaraj, MGR and Nedunchezhiyan) and Eelam politics (Prabhakaran). As MGR had died in 1987, the villain in Parts 4, 5 and 6 was Jayalalitha, the leader of MGR's AIADMK party. Here is a summary of Karunanidhi's autobiographical volumes, who played the villain role for him, since he entered the public life in 1938.

Part 1 (period 1924-69), 755 pages. Hero: Karunanidhi. Villain: Congress Party members of Central Government and Madras State Government.

Part 2 (period 1969-76), 586 pages. Hero: Karunanidhi. Villains: Indira Gandhi and MGR.

Part 3 (period 1976-88), 612 pages. Hero: Karunanidhi. Villain: MGR.

Part 4 (period 1989-95), 633 pages. Hero: Karunanidhi. Villain: Jayalalitha.

Part 5 (period 1996-99), 1,037 pages. Hero: Karunanidhi. Villain: Jayalalitha.

Part 6 (period 2000-03), 551 pages. Hero: Karunanidhi. Villain: Jayalalitha.

In Karunanidhi's story-telling, there are three fascinating aspects. First, friends do turn into foes (like MGR), if they dis-promote his relationship with heroine (aka, the Tamil Nadu chief minister position). Secondly, foes do turn into friends (like Indira Gandhi) for mutually agreeable political dance steps. Thirdly, political foes, after their deaths, do become friends if they 'own' a sizeable vote-bank in Tamil Nadu (such as MGR, Kamaraj or even actor Sivaji Ganesan). As such, Parts 5 and 6 of Karunanidhi's autobiographies do contain complimentary comments about MGR, as opposed to how MGR was portrayed in Parts 2 and 3

There is indeed a necessity to write the history of DMK party and its offshoot such as All India Anna DMK (AIADMK), the party established by MGR. But, Karunanidhi's account is full of bias for selective inclusion of events, cartoons and media reports. One notable example in vol. 5 was the omission of Ponniah Ramar Pillai incident of the discovery of herbal gasoline (aka 'herbal fuel') in 1996. At that time, Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister and he was shown in a TV news clip, watching Ramar Pillai demonstrating his 'miraculous' discovery to the media. Instantly, Karunanidhi pledged financial assistance for research and building a factory! But, Ramar Pillai's so-called discovery was immediately discredited. Thus, Karunanidhi had conveniently omitted telling this pledge from his autobiography. It is a pity that such willing omissions smear the quality of Karunanidhi's autobiography.

In his preface to Part 5, Karunanidhi writes as follows: "Though this is called my autobiography, one cannot separate my life, and DMK's life from each other. As such, both have been mixed and the previous four parts had been written in such inter-related terms. One gets the feeling that in this mixing process, Karunanidhi had completely forgotten to tell his personal life. Though he is supposed to entertain a live-in relationship with his third wife Rajathi Ammal in 1967 (who gave birth to his daughter Kanimozhi in January 1968), both women do not merit an entry in his autobiography until the end of four parts! Only in page 97 of Part Five, his 'companion' (the Tamil word used is, 'thunaiivi')

Rajathi and daughter Kanimozhi appears in an event which happened in 2001 June 29, when he was attacked by the police personnel who came to his house to arrest him. This is in distinct contrast to how MGR had treated his relationship with his future third wife V.N. Janaki since 1947, when he wrote his autobiography during 1970-72. Furthermore, MGR was more forthcoming in describing the relationship between his 2nd wife (Sadhanandavathi) and 3rd wife (Janaki). But, Karunanidhi had not written a single sentence, in his six volumes, about the relationship between his 2nd wife (Dayalu) and 3rd wife (Rajathi).

Politics of MGR

Despite their biases, faults, errors in omission, and oversimplifications, Karunanidhi's autobiographical volumes do provide relevant information on MGR's political career. As such, they cannot be ignored outrightly. For example, in part 2 of his autobiography, Karunanidhi had reproduced a speech MGR made in October 8, 1972 at Chennai, on the felicitation ceremony for him on receiving the 'Bharat' award. Here is its translation:



D.V. Narayanasamy

“I had a policy. Earlier, I was with Congress [Party]. Then, for four years I was not affiliated with any party and was a loner. I found my ideas were represented in each party. Finally, after reading Anna’s book, ‘Pana Thottam’ [Money Garden, 1947], I realized that the economic principles described in it was agreeable to me. I wished to follow Anna’s path entered his party. Poet Kannadasan says, Karunanidhi brought me into this party. Pitiabile! It was D.V.Narayanasamy who introduced me to Anna. Karunanidhi and I debated (frequently). I would have talked about Congress [Party] and also about discrimination. One time, I was a militant after accepting Communist policies. When trains were derailed, I might have known about it. I guess so. But, when Communists found fault with Netaji [Subhas Chandra Bose], on the commands from Russia, I had dismantled my links [with them]. I realized the policy that the politics of Indian subcontinent should be decided in the Indian subcontinent. Like

this, I learnt one by one, and finally entered the DMK realizing that Anna's policy would bring new life for masses."

Pana Thottam was a short, compact tract authored by Annadurai, but it was not so prominent as the author's other influential tracts such as Ariya Mayai [The Ariya Illusion] or Kamba Rasam [The Taste of Kambur, the epic poet]. Subsequently, MGR did title one of his movies with the same name Pana Thottam (1963), produced by G.N. Velumani. About influence of meeting D.V. Narayanasamy (born 1921) for the first time, MGR had written as follows in chapter 93: "I cannot remember now the place and time when we met first. However, he was one of the many individuals who helped me in entering the light path of my journey, from the dark path. There were many who helped me to walk in the light path, but Mr. D.V. N. was the one who took me to the 'Sun' [Arignar Anna]...."

In his autobiography, MGR does not mention much about the books that influenced his life. But, he does mention that when he met Anna for the first time, Anna had asked, 'Have you read Khandekar's books?' Without waiting for his answer, Anna had offered him a Khandekar book, the title of which in English translation appears to be 'Burnt Blossom', and advised him, 'Study this. You may get good ideas.' V.S. Khandekar (1898-1976) was an eminent Marathi author.



MGR in make-up as Jesus with Karunanidhi (circa 1969)

MGR was modest enough to acknowledge that his schooling years were minimal and had to enter the Original Boys Drama Company in Madurai to earn a living for his stomach and family. Nevertheless, during his adult years, he had enlarged the range of his interests by perseverance. K. Ravindar, one of MGR's assistants, had recorded in his memoir a few episodes he was familiar with MGR's reading habits. Here are some. In 1958, when MGR was held in detention at Mylapore Police station, with fellow DMK activist and actor S.S. Rajendran, somehow Ravindar was able to enter the room where both actors were seated. After soliciting food to fill the stomach, MGR had demanded that 'It's boring to be here. Will you bring any book?' And the police official had to grudgingly permit it.

After Karunanidhi became the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, around 1969, there was an announcement that MGR would act in a movie produced by G.N. Velumani. The plot was based on Jesus Christ story,

and the movie's title was 'Parama Pitha' [Holy Father]. The opening day shooting was held, with MGR in make up as Jesus, and Karunanidhi himself participating in the function. Ravindar describes that MGR wanted to learn more about the practiced laws and lives of Christian priests and instructed him to learn more about such details from Father Samineni Arulappa (1924-2005), who was then serving the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore. After meeting Ravindar, Fr. Arulappa offered positive appreciation for MGR taking that specific role, and handed a book to be given to MGR. Ravindar had failed to provide additional details about that book. Somehow, on after thoughts, MGR had abandoned playing the Jesus role, with the quip, "After reading the steps to become a priest and the associated mental refinements needed, I cannot consider them as mere priests, but as great heroes. Alexander, Napoleon, and Emperor Asoka were military heroes. But, these souls fight and win against mental conflicts. I don't wish to project them as suffering from mental deficit." Thus, ended the movie based on Jesus story. However, other sources had indicated that there was a political sub plot on why MGR abandoned this project. The conflict between Karunanidhi and MGR was brewing, when the former promoted the movie debut of his eldest son Muthu (born 1948), as a rival to MGR was one reason. In another plane, Karunanidhi was also interested in fishing the Christian vote in Tamil Nadu's southern constituencies to DMK party, by using MGR's movie as a political vehicle. Having got wind of this dual ploy of DMK's master tactician, MGR delivered the final blow that he wouldn't be a part of this 'Jesus' act.

According to Ravindar, prior to assuming the Tamil Nadu chief minister position in 1977, MGR had asked for a Tamil translation of Bertrand Russell's 'Power: A New Social Analysis' (1938). As the text was rich in law and politics, he had solicited the translation specifically from R. Mohanarangam, one of his party MPs. Ravindar also includes the information that MGR's elder brother Chakrapani had a Tamil translation of Jean Jacques Rousseau's masterpiece Du Contrat Social (Social Contract, 1762). And MGR prepared his mind by reading that version as well.

MGR memorial inaugurated

The Hindu (International Edition), May 26, 1990
MADRAS, May 17.

A memorial housing various articles used by and connected with the life of the late Chief Minister, M. G. Ramachandran, located at his residence in Arcot Mudaliar Street in T.Nagar was thrown open to public at a simple function today.

Attended by his erstwhile Cabinet colleagues and close admirers, Mrs. Janaki Ramachandran, lighted a Kuthivilakhu to mark the inauguration. Mr. N. C. Raghavachari, advocate and former executor of MGR's will unveiled a bust of the late Chief Minister at the entrance of the memorial and also inaugurated the exhibition of portraits, books and mementoes.

The exhibits, included personal belongings of MGR, such as the fur cap and a pair of dark glasses. Five thousand books on various subjects, 200 shields and trophies, presented to him

during his official tours as Chief Minister to various districts and also on momentous occasions, such as the inauguration of the noon-meal programme, gifts received by him for his distinguished performance in films are on display in three spacious halls in the house.

Letters received by him from national leaders and statesmen such as Rajaji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Radhakrishnan, C. N. Annadurai and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, photographs with leaders of various political hues, the car used by him for election tours and on other important occasions, citations given by various universities, the Bharat Ratna and Bharat awards, silver swords and sceptres presented to him by his admirers, and a golden mango on a silver tree presented to him to mark a decade of his tenure as the Chief Minister of the State, were some of the important exhibits.

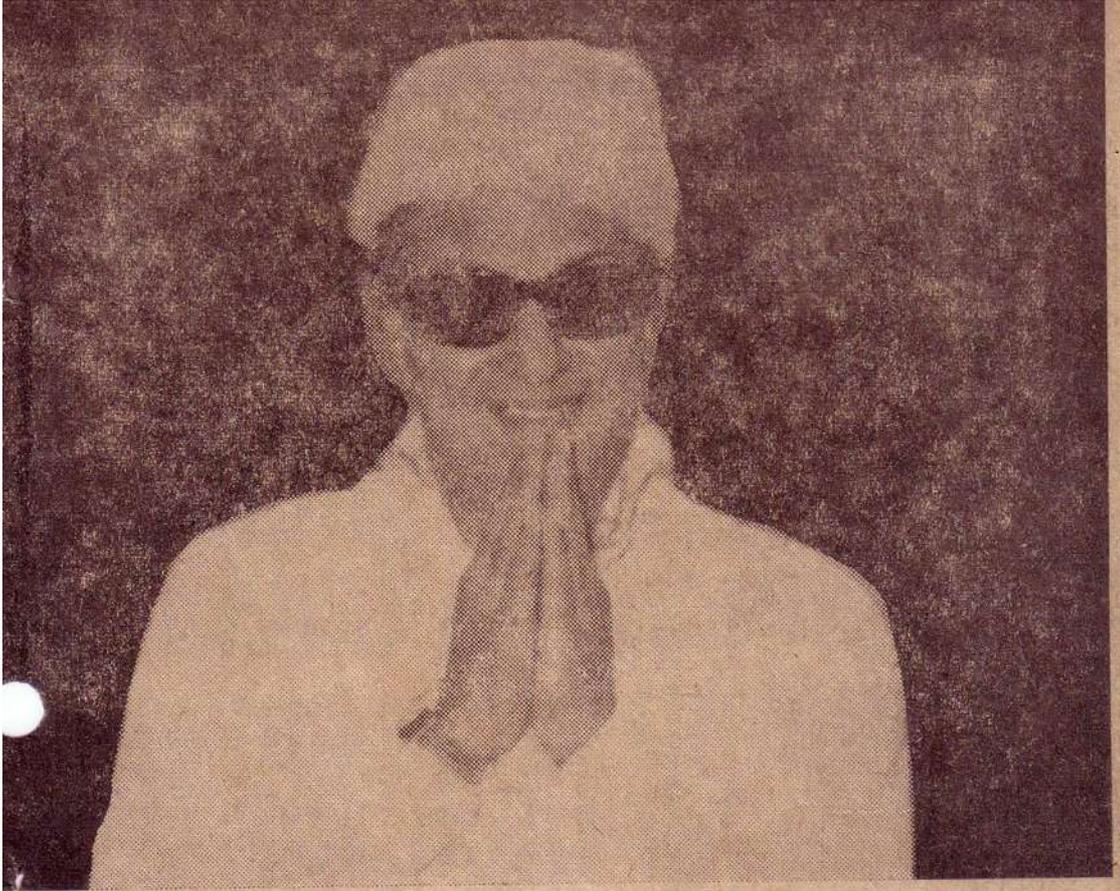
Among those present at the function were former Ministers, Messrs R. M. Veerappan, K. A. Krishnaswamy, S. Thirunavukkarasu, M. Muthuswamy and Panruti S. Ramachandran and P. H. Pandian and S. D. Ugamchand, MLAs. Poor feeding was arranged to mark the occasion.

It was a

surprise for me that when I read Ravindar's published thoughts on MGR in 2010 (the book appeared in 2009), that Bertrand Russell's 'Power' was a decisive choice by MGR in learning how to exert power over other folks. As an aside, I present here what I wrote to the Nobel Foundation website's 'Readers Comments' section on this particular book, in 2003. "Bertrand Russell's book 'Power; A new social analysis' is my favorite. It is a small book of ~200 pages. It was published in 1938. In the Introduction, Russell places his hypothesis; that is, 'power' is for social sciences what 'energy' is for natural sciences. I found this comparison fascinating. He says, like energy – power also has various components which are transferable from one form to another. Unless one understands this concept, limited focus on one form of power will be incomplete and erroneous. In this book, Russell provides from every possible angle – historical, religious, anthropological, social, military and political – the use and abuse of power by humans since the beginning of civilization. I see this book as a bottle of concentrated honey. Every chapter has to be tasted sip by sip at frequent intervals – at least that's what I have been doing since 1988 when I bought that book in the year my elder daughter was born. Even at the personal level, it is

a fulfilling book on child rearing. How to balance power and love for one's own children? It was not a 'great' book by reviewer's scale or popularity scale. But unless one has the ability to at least try to think at the level of Russell (not an easy task for sure!), mediocre minds of reviewers or readers cannot grasp the serious message dealt in that book." The popular website of the Nobel Foundation, Stockholm [http://www.nobelprize.org/educational/literature/books/comments.php?print=1&id=621&nextid=640&name=RussellEarl] still retains this comment.

As of now, I never had the opportunity to visit the MGR Memorial House in Chennai, which was inaugurated in 1990. A short news item that appeared in the Hindu daily [International Edition, May 26, 1990] informed the readers that exhibit included 5,000 books on various subjects. It is difficult guess what proportion of these books were purchased by MGR for reading, and what proportion were gifts from his fans, well-wishers and guests.



135

நான் ஏன் பிறந்தேன்?

நான் கடந்துவந்த அரசியல் பாதை

மதிப்பிற்குரிய எனது அன்பு வாசகர்களே! பெரியோர்களே! நாய்மார்களே! நண்பர்களே!

தற்போது எவ்வளவு பெரிய சூமை என் மீது சூமத்தப்பட்டுள்ளது என்பதை நீங்கள் எல்லோருமே அறிவீர்கள். எனவே, “நான் ஏன் பிறந்தேன்” என்னும் எனது வாழ்க்கைப் பயணத் தொடரில் இந்த வாரப் பகுதியை எழுத இயலவில்லை. அடுத்த வாரம் முதல் “நான் கடந்து வந்த அரசியல் பாதை” என்னும் தலைப்பின் கீழ் “நான் ஏன் பிறந்தேன்” என்ற இதே தொடரில் தொடர்ந்து

எழுதவிருக்கிறேன் என்பதைப் பணி வன்புடன் தெரிவித்துக் கொள்ளுகிறேன்.

என்றும் எனக்கு உங்கள் அனைவருடைய பெருந்துணையும் ஆசியும் உண்டு என்பதை நான் தெளிவாக உணர்ந்திருப்பதுடன், உங்கள் அனைவருக்கும் என் இதயம் நிறைந்த நன்றியையும் வணக்கங்களையும் காணிக்கையாக்குகிறேன்.

அன்பன்,

எம். ஜி. ராமச்சந்திரன்.

27—10—72

MGR autobiography Final Note #135 dated Oct 27 1972

“[We are] born somewhere. [We] grow somewhere. [We] die somewhere. Like this, somewhere! Somewhere!! My life has been structured. Born in Ceylon, nurtured in Tamilnadu, recently I experienced a new happening. It cannot be rejected that every human faces tests...” This was what MGR wrote as a farewell note to his readers, after he was thrown out of DMK party, then led by his friend M. Karunanidhi in late 1972.

Naturally, comparisons are inevitable. After MGR abruptly stopped his autobiography, Karunanidhi began to serialize his autobiography Nenjukku Neethi [Justice for Heart] in 1973, when he was 49. In his first volume, consisting of 754 pages [released in 1975], Karunanidhi covered his life from 1924 to 1969. His second volume, consisting of 586 pages was released in 1987. I mention the differences between MGR’s and Karunanidhi’s autobiographies. First, compared to Karunanidhi’s autobiographical volumes, I find that MGR’s autobiography was more self-introspective. Secondly, while Karunanidhi had focused more on his political involvement and less on stage-movie career, MGR had focused more on his stage-movie career, and less on his political involvement.

MGR also had not failed to include his trouble with the nosy press media. He had to serve defamation notice to Blitzdaily, published from Bombay. In Tamilnadu itself, he had identified weeklies such as Kumudam, Thinamanikathir and Thuglak (edited by comedian Cho Ramasamy) as ‘trouble makers’ which picked on him to increase their circulations. Lack of a good name index is a demerit for these two volumes. It seems that publishers of Tamil books never bother to serve readers’ interests in preparing indices to bulky books like these.

Missing Farewell Note

*As I had indicated previously in this series, I have a collection of 12 original chapters between 120 and 135, when they appeared in the Ananda Vikatan in 1972. The published volume ends at chapter 134. But, in the final chapter 135, with MGR's name and dateline Oct.27, 1972, had been omitted in printing. I provide a scan of this one page farewell note nearby. In this farewell note, he had written as follows: "My respected readers, elders, women seniors, friends, – Now all of you know what a big burden had been placed on me. Therefore, I'm unable to continue writing this week's section on 'Why I was Born?'. With humiliation, I let you know that from next week, I plan to **continue to write** 'My Past Political Path' under this 'Why I was Born' series. I have sincerely recognized that your help and trust are always available to me. Thus, I offer to all of you my heartfelt thanks and greetings now." [emphasis, as in the original]*

Unfortunately, MGR couldn't keep his word to his supporters and fans, due to his multiple schedules and tasks hanging over his shoulder that deserved his urgent attention. The ultimate losers were his millions of fans.

Final Comment

The publisher Kannadhasan Pathippagam provide a 'Notice' in the front pages of both volumes about copyright infringement. In the 2nd volume, publishing editor Gandhi Kannadhasan also makes an appeal by name about copyright infringement and adds that 'all are requested to respect MGR's sentiments on copyright infringement'. This appears fine, as long as the text material is concerned. As I have mentioned above, I did check the original text material with the published version now. But, when it comes to photos incorporated in the book, it would have been ideal, if the publisher had presented the original photos that appeared when the text was serialized between 1970 and 1972. As a stickler for detail, MGR would have chosen the photo he wanted to present to the readers and had permitted the use of only one photo per chapter. In the printed

version, I find that the original photos (approved by MGR for publication) had been replaced with irrelevant photos from family albums! I refer specifically to those appearing between pages 1482 and 1484. I do agree that photos of some individuals who are mentioned in the text (especially MGR's mentors Kali N. Ratnam and K.P. Kesavan, and MGR's personal physician Dr. P.R. Subramaniam) are more than welcome. But, why include photos of individuals, who are not mentioned in the text at all. My point is that, the publisher had erred in respecting MGR's sentiments first.



Sivaji Ganesan (lt) and MGR (rt) in 'Koondukili' (2) movie

About his professional status, MGR had written, "What was my financial status then? Occasionally we borrow money. No, our mother borrowed money. Almost all the small jewelry in the house (we didn't have any 'large' jewelry) had been pawned. In those occasions, somehow I was offered small roles. We satisfied ourselves with the advances received for those roles. Though Sadhanandavathi and I had

opportunity to enjoy life for some time, even such opportunities were mishandled by my mother and her mother.” MGR does include the conflicts his mother and mother-in-law had in the joint household, pertaining to MGR’s previous marriage and his poverty.

In the subsequent chapter 101 entitled, ‘You are lucky’ – the words of Dr. Vasudeva Rao, who treated Sadhanandavathi to him, MGR frankly described his sexual feelings briefly. He had written, “Even though doctors asserted that [she – Sadhanandavathi] is recovering well, due to scary thoughts she, me and our household folks had, we had been extremely cautious. For one or two years, though married, we two lived a life with non-conjugal demands.” MGR had mentioned four doctors who treated Sadhanandavathi, namely Dr. Vasudeva Rao, Dr. Santhosam, Dr. U. Ananda Rao and Dr. P.R.Subramaniam. Among these four, Dr. Vasudeva Rao and Dr. Santhosam (both TB specialists) had predicted only three months for his wife in 1944. Subsequently, Dr. Subramaniam (who was a general physician, and later became the family physician of MGR) treated Sadhanandavathi with injections and drugs. MGR mentions that she did receive 200 injections altogether, beginning with 2 injections per day. “Somehow with luck, Dr. Subramaniam’s treatment allowed my wife to live for 18 years since then.”, according to MGR.

Chapter 104 in MGR’s autobiography, entitled ‘Little Rest for Her Soul’ was a fascinating chapter, among all the 134 chapters. In it, MGR had revealed his thoughts openly of being an expectant father and how his hopes were dashed. The situation was described by him in chapter 101, while he was shooting ‘Marma Yogi’ movie at Coimbatore Central Studio, one night he received a telegram “Danger for Ammukutti [the pet name of his wife]. Come immediately.” He expressed his concern to Mr. M. Somasundaram, the boss of Jupiter Pictures. At that time there were no trains. The boss kindly offered his car to MGR and advised, ‘Don’t travel during night. Even though there’s a delay by two hours or so, its better to start early in the morning’. As ‘Marma Yogi’ movie was

released in February 1951, one is not sure when this incident happened. MGR also didn't identify the specific year in his recollections.

Then, in chapter 104, MGR recollects the event as follows: "Rather than the worries I had about why Sadhanandavathi had to undergo a surgery, when I learnt about the reason for that surgery, my worry did multiply manifold. How can I feel helplessness when one of my biggest wishes in my heart, and what is naturally common to any man getting shattered becoming a reality? Is it wrong to have a wish to become a father? If nature had given the verdict that one cannot become a father, then that person can be comfortable with the situation. But, when nature and deeds had proved perfectly that one can become a father, but the situation and reality was deprived beyond control, how could one feel not hurt? My situation was like that.

The nature convinced us that my wife Sadhanandavathi and I could have a child. Doctors also attested to it. First time, she conceived; but she miscarried. This time also, she conceived. But to save her life by surgery, the fetus was prevented from developing...I arrived at the hospital with these thoughts...One day she had screamed at home due to extreme stomachache. Dr. P.R. Subramaniam checked her and gave medicine for stomachache. But recurring intolerable stomachache made the doctor to invite a lady doctor for checking. Then, it became known that she had conceived. But, Dr. P.R.Subramaniam had insisted, "It cannot be. I had told MGR strongly, not to have intercourse. He wouldn't have disobeyed. So, this cannot be pregnancy." The X-ray revealed that the pregnancy was an ectopic one, and as the tube could burst anytime, surgery was decided to save the mother and lose the fetus...Dr. P.R. Subramaniam didn't like to see me. He was extremely angry that though he had explained to me her health condition, I had had intercourse. He was a doctor; he did his duty. But for me, having lived more than two years without conjugal relations, I had failed in the game with Nature. Then only I realized that such a loss of mine had turned detrimental to the life of Sadhanandavathi. I had cursed my feelings, why I couldn't tolerate for some more months...Though I could

somehow convince myself, I found it difficult to convince Dr. P.R.Subramaniam, about my selfish deed. He didn't even want to look at my face. Only after she recovered her health and returned home, Mr. P.R.Subramaniam talked to me. I expressed my heart-felt excuse. But, I asked him, 'How long do you expect me to live like this? How do you trust that I have to live without any sexual desire and control myself?' He did understand my situation. But, he responded, 'To achieve a great deed, somehow we have to sacrifice something. Like this, if you wish Sadhanandavathi to live, then you have to adapt to inconveniences and setbacks.'

MGR's autobiography re-released

Thorough the courtesy of my friend and fellow MGR biographer R. Kannan, I was informed that MGR's autobiography 'Naan Yean Piranthen' [Why I was Born?] had been re-released last January in two volumes. He also took the trouble to gift me copies of two volumes, and I express my debt to him for this kindness. The publisher is Kannadhasan Pathippagam, and the publishing editor is Gandhi Kannadhasan (son of poet Kannadhasan). He had successfully negotiated the publishing rights with the current holder of copyrights, J. Surendran (the son of V.N.Janaki and Ganapathy Bhat). Part I, consisting first 63 chapters in 736 pages, is priced at 460 Indian rupees. Part II, consisting of chapters 64 to 134 from 737 to 1488 pages, is priced at 500 Indian rupees.



MGR in 1953 'Naam' movie

A Response received from Mr. Shrikanth Veeravalli

I received an email from Shrikanth Veeravalli on Sept. 6th, related to my review of his recently published MGR biography book (see Part 18). As I requested permission from him to post his details unedited, and he had given me that permission, I provide it below, with my response sent to him.

*“Dear Sir,
I am not sure whether this mail will reach you. But this is the one I could*

find out from the Internet. Will be making further efforts to find a way to communicate to you. Just today, I happened to see you review of the book. Firstly my apologies for the fact that credits are missing before indulging in explanations.

This attempt to write a thin book was to give a brief introduction about one of the tallest leaders from Tamil Nadu a new non-Tamil reading Tamil generation didn't know about. Given that brief I set it as simple as possible while being in awe with R. Kannan's work of Annadurai and the huge gulf between such a work and mine. Nonetheless that was the brief and I took it religiously.

If you had noticed, the book has not been edited at all. The second draft was sent by me in August 2010, when DMK was in power and that finds a mention. But after that draft, there was an eerie silence about publication and after 3 long years it suddenly found live in the same draft format without carrying the Bibliography and other sources I used. I even urgently forwarded a mail approval I obtained from Ms. Praminda Jacob to use a portion of her work. But that was of no avail. I am equally disappointed at this, but as the author the blame resides with me and I still take ownership for the faux pas.

Regarding the quote which is not yours, but attributed to you is once again an error stemming out of absence of editing (this is from the Anthology of 11 articles for which you provided a front note) .

I also don't want to dwell on other inconveniences that were in place. Overall it was a very unsatisfactory experience for me. It could have been much better. I once apologize for the errors that has crept in the book of missing credits and factual ones.

Regards

Shrikanth Veeravalli

PS: Hindu is a leading newspaper in India and I set crossword in that. They have nothing to do with this book. The book was published by Rupa & Co. If you were mentioning with that awareness and as a criticism

about me, then it is invalid. Crossword setting is a different creative exercise. There is no connection between writing and crossword setting.

My response to his email, sent on Sept.8, was as follows:

Dear Shrikanth,

Thank you for your mail, which did reach me on Sept. 6th. Thanks also for your thoughts of communicating with me, for my criticism of your first book. I do accept your reasoning for the 'inconveniences' and 'unsatisfactory experience' with your first book. These are part and parcel of any writer's life. You have to learn from your experiences, to create a better work next time.

However, I differ from your thoughts which you had written as postscript (PS); i.e., "Crossword setting may be a 'different creative exercise. There is no connection between writing and crossword setting". In my view, there is direct link between writing and crossword setting. Both have their origin in words and deals with vocabulary. Lets leave it at that.

I'm still curious to know, something more about you; such as, (1) whether you are a TAMILIAN or a KANNADA native. (2) your age. If you cannot read Tamil, then you might have missed much of original literature about MGR, which was my focus of the criticism of your book.

Lastly, can I request, whether you give permission for me to reproduce your entire letter, in my continuing series on 'MGR Remembered'. I will not edit your letter at all. Best regards."

In a subsequent email, Veeravalli did answer that he is a TAMILIAN from Madurai.

Generativity Concept of Erik H. Erikson

It is somewhat coincidental that psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1902-1994) published his influential study of human development 'Childhood and Society' in 1950. It was also in 1950 that MGR emerged as the hero figure in Tamil movies due to the success of his two movies Manthiri Kumari and Marutha Naatu Ilavarasi. Among the 8 stages of human life delineated by Ericson, at the penultimate stage- maturity, he identified the psychosocial crises facing this period as generativity vs. self-absorption.



'மதுரைவீரன்' படத்தில் எம்.ஜி.ஆர்., டி.எஸ்.பாலையா

MGR and T.S.Balaiah in 1956 'Madurai Veeran' movie

Erikson had elaborated generativity in 1950 as follows: “This term encompasses the evolutionary development which has made man the teaching and instituting as well as the learning animal....Generativity is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation. The concept of generativity is meant to include such more popular synonyms as productivity and creativity, which, however, cannot replace it. [Words in italics, as in the original.]”

Later, in a dialogue with Richard Evans published in 1969, Erikson expressed his generativity thoughts with adulthood stage in life as follows: “At this stage one begins to take one’s place in society, and to help in the development and perfection of whatever it produces. And one takes responsibility for that. I know that generativity is not an elegant word, but it means to generate in the most inclusive sense. If I would call this strength creativity, I would put too much emphasis on the particular creativity which we ascribe to particular people. I use the word ‘generativity’ because I mean everything that is generated from generation to generation: children, products, ideas and works of art.” [Word in italics, as in the original.]”

In case of folks, who are unmarried or unfortunate in not able to produce their own children, Erikson had offered a meaning for their lives. Erikson had stated,

“Even without having children, provided an individual can bear the unavoidable frustration. It is possible for a person to fulfill his generativity by working with other people’s children or helping to create a better world for them.”

Usually adult humans enjoy the thrill of generating their own children. Once this phase is passed, their contribution to the society comes to a standstill. But many talented adults have had less blessing in generating their own children. Even among MGR’s contemporaries, there were individuals like Mother Teresa, Nobel-prize winning astrophysicist Subramanyan Chandrasekhar, MGR’s mentor Anna, Congress Party leader K. Kamaraj, eminent Carnatic musicians like Madurai Mani Iyer

and M.S. Subbulakshmi, who were childless either by choice or by circumstances. But they did possess generativity and contributed effectively to the society.

MGR's Generativity in Movies

Having been childless, MGR's primary generativity can be identified with the 133 released movies, he starred between 1936 and 1978, in a span of 42 years. Some books on MGR add 3 more movies [Ek The Rajah (1951) – the Hindi version of Marma Yogi (1951), Sarvadhikari (1951) – the Telugu version of Sarvadhikari (1951), and Genoa (1953) – the Malayalam version of Genoa (1953)] which were dubbed and released in other Indian languages by the producers who made the Tamil movies. MGR's secondary generativity can be identified with his political contributions to Tamil society in Tamilnadu and Eelam between 1967 and 1987. Even among the 133 of MGR's released movies, he cannot be identified as the prime contributor (or generator) of the first 20 of his movies until 1949, excluding one Rajakumari(1947) in which he starred as the hero. Thus, his generativity was essentially limited to 114 Tamil movies, in which he starred as the hero, and a few movies he produced and directed.

The four movies MGR produced were, Naam (We, 1953), Nadodi Mannan (The Vagabond King, 1958), Adimai Penn(Slave Woman, 1969), Ulagam Suttrum Vaalipan (The Lad who circles the Globe, 1973). Among these, MGR and his elder brother M.G. Chakrapani were collaborative partners in the Naam movie, produced under Jupiter-Mekala banner. Other collaborative partners for this movie included M. Karunanidhi, Rajaram, villain actor P.S. Veerappa and director A. Kasilingam. This movie with a social theme, released on March 5, 1953, failed in box office, for various reasons. According to Tamil movie historian Aranthai Narayanan, one reason mentioned was the absence of 'DMK political mix', as the fans had come to expect after Sivaji Ganesan's debut movie Parasakthi's (1952) success. The hero and

heroine role was played by MGR and his partner V.N. Janaki. Chakrapani also played a supporting role. Veerappa was the villain. Karunanidhi wrote the script. Music director. While Chidambaram S. Jayaraman (Karunanidhi's brother in law) was the music director, Kasilingam directed it. Another cited reason for this movie's failure was MGR's face (he played the role of a boxer) was made unattractive to the disappointment of fans. As a consequence, MGR and his brother Chakrapani disentangled themselves as producer collaborators of Mekala Pictures.

The subsequent production of Mekala Pictures was 'Rangoon Radha', released in 1956. This movie was produced by Karunanidhi, Veerappa and director Kasilingam, and adopted from the successful 'Gaslight' (1944) plot, directed by George Cukor. DMK leader Anna wrote the screenplay. Instead of MGR, his cinema pal and 'rival' in the same DMK camp Sivaji Ganesan covered the role played by Charles Boyer and P. Bhanumathi reproduced the Ingrid Bergman's heroine role. Following this movie, even Veerappa left the producer collaboration to establish his own company, PSV Pictures. eventually, the Mekala Pictures banner was carried on by Karunanidhi and his nephew Murasoli Maran. MGR created his own 'MGR Pictures' for his three subsequent productions.

In previous chapters, based on his autobiography, I had described MGR's angst about his inability to become a father with his second wife Sadanandavathi. Due to the complex relationship he had with his actor-partner V.N. Janaki during the 1950s, while his second wife was alive, it is a moot question to pose whether he attempted seriously to become a father with his partner Janaki, when he was in his 30s. There had been rumors floating around in 1950s and 1960s that MGR was impotent, based on the single fact that Janaki had had a son with her previous husband. The chances that these sort of rumors were released due to activity of MGR's professional enemies cannot be discounted. Without supporting medical evidence, one cannot prove conclusively whether MGR suffered from impotence or was subfertile. Why I mention this

personal detail about MGR's health is that, by 1953 (when he joined the DMK party at the age 36) MGR appears to have seriously thought about his generativity in movies, to supplant the lack of generativity in his family life.

DMK Politics of 1950s

Secessionist theme dominated the DMK politics of 1950s. See the two period cartoons on DMK leader Annadurai by Sridhar which appeared in the Ananda Vikatan weekly in 1958. In one, Anna is shown as promoting the Dravida Nadu (consisting of Andhra, Kannada, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) in his microphone, while the 3 loud speakers (tagged Andhra, Kannada and Kerala) reject the demand and only Tamil Nadu speaker releases an affirmative voice. In the other cartoon, Anna is pushed from his chair with the label 'North-South propaganda' by the police. The caption below states that the police auctioned Anna's sofa to collect payment from him.

Mythological stories drawn from epics and the Puranas had become passe, after the eclipse of singing stars M.K.Thygarajah Bhagavathar and P.U. Chinnappa, by MGR and Sivaji Ganesan. DMK's main plank of Tamil pride, North-South distinction (Arya-Dravida conflict) and societal discrimination based on caste became the major themes in 'costume dramas' based on historical themes involving the lives of princes and folk heroes. Ten of MGR's popularly successful movies of 1950s (Marutha Naatu Ilavarasi, Manthiri Kumari, Marma Yogi, Malai Kallan, Gul-E-Bakaavali, Ali Babavum Narpathu Thirudargalum, Madurai Veeran, Maha Devi, Chakravarthi Thirumagal and Nadodi Mannan) reflected this trend.

MGR had claimed that he was attracted to DMK by Anna's writing. One of the popular tracts of Anna was "E! Thazhntha Thamizhagame!" (Hey! Lowly Tamil Nadu). Originally, it was an inspirational speech made by Anna (when he was still at the Dravida Kazhagam of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker) on September 20, 1945 at the convocation ceremony of Annamalai University to honor the services of Tamil

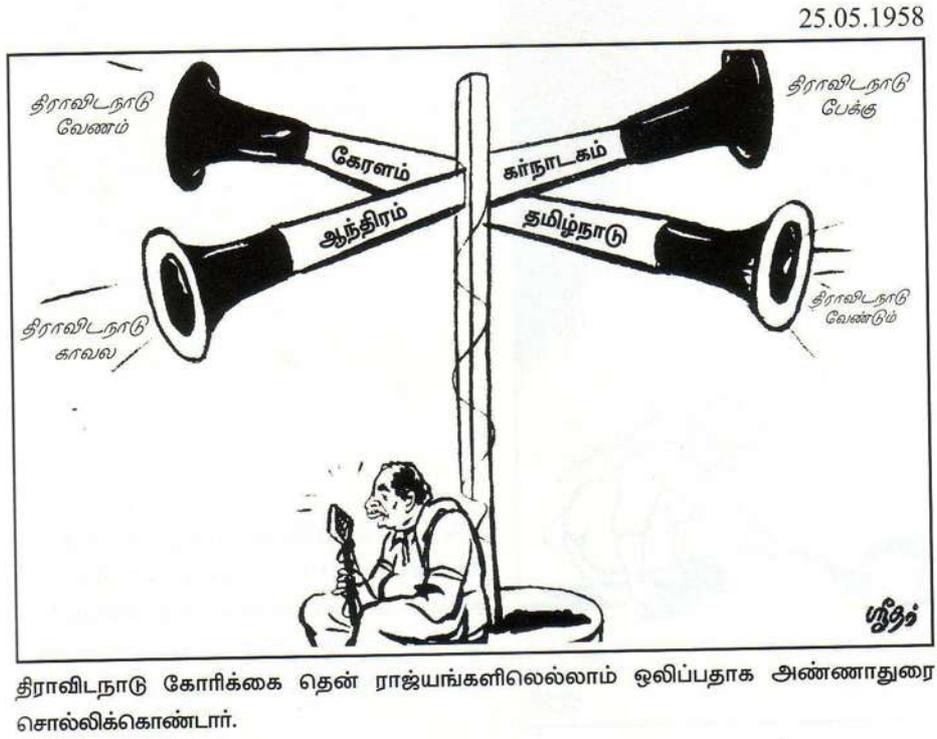
revolutionary poet Bharathi Dasan (1891-1964). Later, it was printed and sold. Towards the end of the speech, Anna alliteratively tweaked the nerves of Tamilians who demanded self-respect in Indian society. In translation, Anna's words rhymed as follows:

“Hey Tamil Nadu! Hey Lowly Tamil Nadu! Blunted Tamil Nadu! One who had forgotten itself – Tamil Nadu! Self-respect demolished Tamil Nadu! Gratitude-less Tamil Nadu! Arts-insensitive Tamil Nadu! One who doesn't know the sense of God – Tamil Nadu! Believing that being cheated is fun – Tamil Nadu! Hey listless Tamil Nadu! Wake up from slumber! Greet the truthful poets! Real poets! Revolutionary poets!”

MGR's revolution in Tamil cinema

Of course, MGR was adept in dialogue delivery. But a 'revolution' he made in Tamil cinema of 1950s was to reduce dialogue delivery in his movies, and deliver the same message in inspirational songs. He might have adapted this strategy for two reasons. First is to differentiate himself from his fellow DMK rival – Sivaji Ganesan, a genius in that segment. Secondly, to escape from the scissors of Congress Party-sponsored censor board. That MGR was a quick study of trends had never been disputed in cinema circles. How the DMK-sponsored movie 'Sorga Vaasal' (Gates to Heaven, 1954) scripted by Anna, featuring DMK's singer-actor K.R. Ramaswamy was mangled by the censor board for political reasons might have influenced MGR's sensible antenna. Having chosen the path of not singing, he had to choose elite lyricists, lyrics arrangers (aka music directors) and playback singers to promote pro-DMK songs. In this, MGR was blessed. Those who had talent, received MGR's nod, irrespective of political affiliations. Among the lyricists, he promoted Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram (1930-1959) though the latter had Communist sympathies. There were other lyricists Bharathidasan, Udumalai Narayanakavi (1899-1981), Tanjai Ramaiya Das (1914-1965) and last but not the least Kannadasan (1927-1981). Among the music directors,

talent was aplenty and MGR had to chose among G. Ramanathan, K.V. Mahadevan, his close pal S.M. Subbiah Naidu, and Visvanathan-Ramamoorthy duo. For playback singers, he could rely on four elite Tamil singers Tiruchi Loganathan, Chidambaram S. Jayaraman, T.M. Soundararajan and Sirkazhi Govindarajan. The magic produced by the collaborative efforts of these lyricists, music directors, singers and MGR still reverberate in numerous songs extolling Tamil pride.



Anna cartoon on Dravida Nadu policy 1958

If I'm not exaggerating, these movie songs had become the 20th century 'devotionals' among the Tamil illiterates replacing the religious hymns of Hindu saints of the earlier centuries. Who are Tamil illiterates is another realistic question. Isn't the children and grandchildren (who cannot read and write Tamil language) of Tamil professional migrants living in the industrialized countries in the 21st century should also be termed as Tamil illiterates?

Not only male playback singers, even female playback singers like Carnatic diva M.L. Vasanthakumari had a song extolling the Tamil pride – ‘Senthamizha Elunthu Vaaraayo- Un singara thaai mozhiyai Paarayo’, (lyricist Kannadasan) in ‘Madurai Veeran’ movie to attract the women fans. Apart from Tamil pride, MGR also focused his attention on the listlessness among Tamil workers, with catchy folk tunes. A few songs of this mode include, Summa Iruntha Sorrukku Nattam (If one idles, food will be lost; lyricist Udumalai Narayana Kavi) in Madurai Veeran movie and Thoongaathe Thambi Thoongathe – Nalla Somberi Enra Peyar Vaangaathe (Don’t sleep brother – and gain the name as a weary fellow; lyricist Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram) in Nadodi Mannan movie. Society’s dregs, parasites and land-owning class (zamindars) were also targeted with catchy songs like, Eththanai Kaalam Thaan Emaruvar Intha Naatile (How long these guys will be cheating us; lyricist Tanjai Ramaiah Das) in Malai Kallan movie, and Kurukku Vazhiyil Vaazhvu Thedidum Thiruddu Ulagamada (The world which revels in crooked route to rob and live; lyricist Kalyanasundaram) in Maha Devi movie.

The MGR movie song which symbolized the Tamil pride sentiment of DMK politics was written by poet Kannadasan for the Mannathi Mannan (King of Kings, 1960) movie, when the lyricist was in the party. The first two lines of this lyric were,

*‘Achcham enpathu madamaiyadah- Anjaamai Dravidar udamaiyadah
Aarilum saavu noorilum saavu – Thayakam kaapathu kadamaiyadah’*

In my English translation, the entire lyric read as follows:

*“Fear is none but cowardice – and the symbol of Dravidas is chivalry
At six or at hundred one could die – but protection of homeland is the
duty.*

*For the growing fetus in her body, a Tamil mother teaches bravery
In challenging times, to protect her face, there will rise her progeny.*

*Many have lived and many have died- but in the minds of masses who
stay long?*

*Those blessed with great heroics and chivalry live forever in the annals
of history.”*

07.12.1958



அண்ணாதுரையிடமிருந்து அபராதத்தை வசூலிக்க அவருடைய சோபாவை போலீசார் ஏலம் விட்டனர்.

Anna punished for Dravida propaganda cartoon 1958

After MGR's death, journalist Sam Rajappa summarized the hold of MGR persona among Tamil masses as, "Having tasted the heady sense of adulation, MGR slowly built up his personal stock while in the DMK.

He created the image of an action hero who used his fists more than his tongue. He showed the masses through his films the importance of fighting to help themselves.” In one of my earlier commentaries on MGR as a role model for heroism among Tamil militants in 1988, I included this comment of Rajappa. When this commentary was posted electronically in the now defunct Tamil Nation website,

I received an email from an irritated Sinhalese correspondent named Saman Jayanetty from Australia. I selectively quote from this 2007 email.

“Dear Dr. Sri Kantha,

I read your article ‘Role Models for Heroism among Tamils’ on www.tamilnation.org and found that it would be very helpful for creating Tamil ‘heroes’ in the years to come... Given the fact that you are seemingly an MGR follower, you must be very intelligent and I am happy about that. You have shown your level of education by considering MGR actor, who used his fist more than his tongue (this is from your own article, in fact), as a role model for Tamils. What great thinking! Hell to the tongue, fist will create ‘heroes’, I think that’s the message you, as an educated adult, want to convey to the young Tamil kids...”

I didn’t reply to this irate correspondent, as he had missed the focal point of my commentary and was ignorant of the contemporary world and cinema. What is wrong with MGR using his fist than the tongue for extoling Tamil pride, if it was OK for Hollywood heroes like John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, actor-turned President Reagan or even idolized Sinhala movie heroes like Gamini Fonseka?

MGR’s main contribution to Tamil movies in 1950s was to chase the devil of psychological paralysis and uplift the wounded Tamil morale. Walter Wanger (1894-1968), an American film producer, contributing a commentary to the American Journal of Sociology wrote in 1941, that movies as a medium of communication can be used to clarify, to inspire

and to entertain. This was at a time, when Americans were tentative, unsure and confused about their role in the Second World War. Elite critics may disagree on realism and artistic nuances of film making; but without doubt, it could be said that MGR's movies of 1950s inspired the Tamil citizens and afforded individual relaxation to day laborers struggling with life's burden.



MGR with S.S.Rajendran (in late 1950s)

In the previous chapter, I introduced Erik Erikson's generativity concept by MGR as a member of DMK in 1950s. As previous observers of DMK politics of that era, especially Robert Hardgrave Jr., had noted MGR was not alone in promoting DMK policies. Due credit should be given to other film artistes, who were MGR's contemporaries. Apart from leader Anna himself, there were actors N.S. Krishnan, K.R. Ramasamy, D.V. Narayanaswamy, Sivaji Ganesan, S.S. Rajendran (Narayanaswamy's brother in law), music director-playback singer Chidambaram S. Jayaraman (Karunanidhi's brother in law), lyricist Udumalai Narayana Kavi, scriptwriter-lyricist M. Karunanidhi, lyricist-script writer Kannadasan and script writer-producer Murasoli Maran (Karunanidhi's nephew) as well. The death of S.S. Rajendran (SSR) on October 24 at the age of 86, closes one chapter among the DMK's 'heavies' of that era. This death leaves Karunanidhi alone, as the 'last man standing'!

Difference between Madras and Bombay movies of 1950s

*During the 1950s, there were **two big differences** between the movies produced in Madras and Bombay. First, Hindi movies produced in Bombay, in the spirit of newly independent India, the call was for unity and nation-building. Contrastingly, due to the influence of DMK's then secessionist principle and its major players in the drama-movie world, Tamil movies promoted separate state idea for Tamils, and the separate culture of Northern Aryans and Southern Dravidians. Secondly, Muslims played a major role in Hindi movies as actors (carrying masked Hindu stage names), play back singers, lyricists, music directors and directors. But, in Tamil movies, Muslims couldn't gain a prominent strong hold. In 1950s, among the Muslims who shined in the Hindi movies the following deserve mention. Actors: Dilip Kumar (Yusuf Khan), Madhubala (Begum Mumtaz Jehan), Nargis (Fatima Rashid), Waheeda Rehman; Playback singer: Mohammed Rafi; Music director: Naushad Ali;*

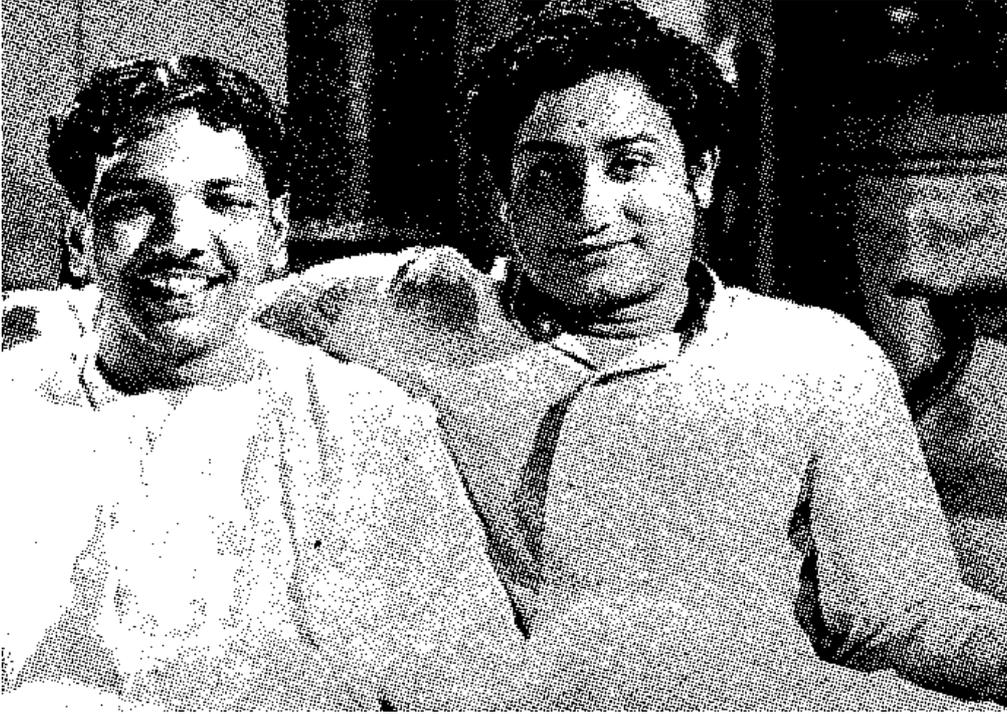
Director: Mehboob (Ramjan Khan); Lyricist-director: Kamal Amrohi (Syed Amir Haider Kamal).

In the Tamil movies, there was one hero with Muslim name – G.M. Basheer. He couldn't rise to the top rank. Another actor with a Muslim name, M.K. Mustapha, was in MGR's drama troupe. Though he acted in a few Tamil movies, he couldn't elevate himself as a top rank hero. Subsequently, there was a stunt Muslim actor C.L. Anandan (as a masked name) who became a 'hit' for a few movies, but faded soon. Lyricist Ka. Mu. Sheriff, was the only one Muslim who was able gain distinct name recognition in 1950s. There was one music director with the name T.M. Ibrahim, who scored for a few Tamil movies. In his autobiography, MGR mentions briefly about this Ibrahim (as one "who is younger to me by one or two years"), who later became a music director, though he was more interested in acting and singing. Why Muslims couldn't make it to the top in Tamil movies deserves an in-depth study. Not that, Hindu parochialism ruled the roost in Tamil Nadu. After all, DMK preached atheism and anti-Brahmin sentiments in 1950s.

Leading Heroes of Tamil Movies in 1950s

In chronological order of birth, the leading heroes of Tamil movies in 1950s were as follows: K.R. Ramasamy(1914-1971)–singer/actor, MGR (1917-1987), T.R. Ramachandran (1917?-1990), Gemini Ganesan (1920-2005), T.R. Mahalingam (1923-1978) – singer/actor, SSR (1928-2014), and Sivaji Ganesan (1928-2001). Comedian actor N.S. Krishan (1909-1957) should also be added to this list as a senior contemporary. Among these, five other than T.R. Ramachandran, Gemini Ganesan and T.R. Mahalingam were affiliated with DMK. Among the eight, K.R. Ramasamy, T.R. Mahalingam and N.S. Krishnan belonged to the old school of singer-actor category, and their opportunities waned in the late 1950s, with the rise of triumvirates of Tamil movies (MGR, Sivaji Ganesan and Gemini Ganesan). N.S. Krishnan became an alcoholic and died prematurely in 1957. SSR held on his own, for his polished Tamil

dialogue delivery style and occasionally appearing with Sivaji Ganesan, in movies. SSR also appeared with MGR in two costume-adventure movies, Raja Desingu (King Desingu, 1960) and Kaanchi Thalaivan (Leader of Kanchi, 1963).



Karunanidhi (lt) and Sivaji Ganesan (rt) in 1950s

Brief Chronology of Political and Cinema Activities of DMK Members (1954-59)

To summarize the activities of MGR's contemporaries, I provide the following chronology, based on the sources (Film News Anandan, Kannan, Kannadasan, Karunanidhi and Sivaji Ganesan) cited at the end.

1954 March 3: release of Manohara (Manohara) movie, starring Sivaji Ganesan and SSR, scripted by Karunanidhi. A big success in box office.

1954 April 9: release of Illara Jothi (Light of Domesticity) movie, starring Sivaji Ganesan and scripted/lyrics by Kannadasan. A box office failure.

1954 May 25: release of Sorga Vasal (Heaven's Gate) movie, starring K.R. Ramasamy and scripted by Anna. Moderately received, due to bad mauling by censors.

1954 June 22: First release of Kannadasan's journal Thenral.

1954 July 22: release of Malai Kallan (Mountain Thief) movie, starring MGR and scripted by Karunanidhi. A big box office success.

1954 July 30: release of Thuli Vizham (Poison Drop) movie, starring K.R. Ramasamy (hero) and Sivaji Ganesan (villain), scripted and directed by A.S.A. Samy.

1954 Aug. 26: release of Koondu Kili (Caged Parrot) movie, starring MGR and Sivaji Ganesan. A box-office failure.

1954 October 15: release of Rathak Kanneer (Blood Tears) movie, starring M.R. Radha and SSR, with Chidambaram Jayaraman as music director. A big success

1955 July 29: release of Gul e Baghavali (Gul e Baghavali) movie, starring MGR. a big success.

1956 January 14: release of Alibabavum 40 Thirudarkalum (Alibaba and 40 Thieves) movie. The first Tamil movie to be produced in color (Geva). A big success.

1956 April 13: release of Madurai Veeran (Hero of Madurai) movie, starring MGR. A big successful movie for MGR, in which the hero character dies at the end!

1956 September 4: release of Thaiku Pin Thaaram (Wife after Mother) movie, starring MGR. The first successful movie in a social theme for MGR. A big success.

1956 November: Tamilnadu suffered from disruptive cyclone damage. DMK launced a fund drive to support victims. Sivaji Ganesan also became a victim of sibling rivalry and discord in receiving deserved recognition. The instigator of such a design, was not identified by him openly, but he hints Karunanidhi.

1957 March 31: Madras State Assembly election. DMK candidates contested for the first time, under Independent label. While Karunanidhi won at Kulithalai constituency, SSR and Kannadasan lost in their respective constituencies Theni and Thirukoshtiyur.

1957: Sivaji Ganesan sidelined from DMK and dissociate himself from the party, after a visit to Tirupathi temple. MGR receives prominent treatment. Kannadasan openly attacks Sivaji Ganesan, in his journal Thenral.

1957 August 30: death of comedian actor and senior contemporary N.S. Krishnan.

1957 December 9: Prime Minister Nehru delivers a speech at Tiruchirapalli that he was ready even for a war against secessionist tendencies promoted by DMK.

1958 January 6: Black Flag protest to prime minister Nehru during his visit to Madras. MGR detained at Madras jail with SSR.

1958 February 22-23: DMK's regional conference held at Deva Kottai at Ramanathapuram district. Opening address delivered by SSR. Karunanidhi scripted drama 'Rising Sun' staged for the first time.

1958 March 1: DMK receives 'Rising Sun' as its official symbol from the Election Commission.

1958 June 27: release of Malai idda Mangai (A Virgin, who garlanded) movie, starring T.R. Mahalingam; produced by Kannadasan. Success in box office, but not for Kannadasan!

1958 August 22: release of Nadodi Mannan (Vagabond King) movie, the first movie under 'MGR Pictures' banner. A big success in box office.

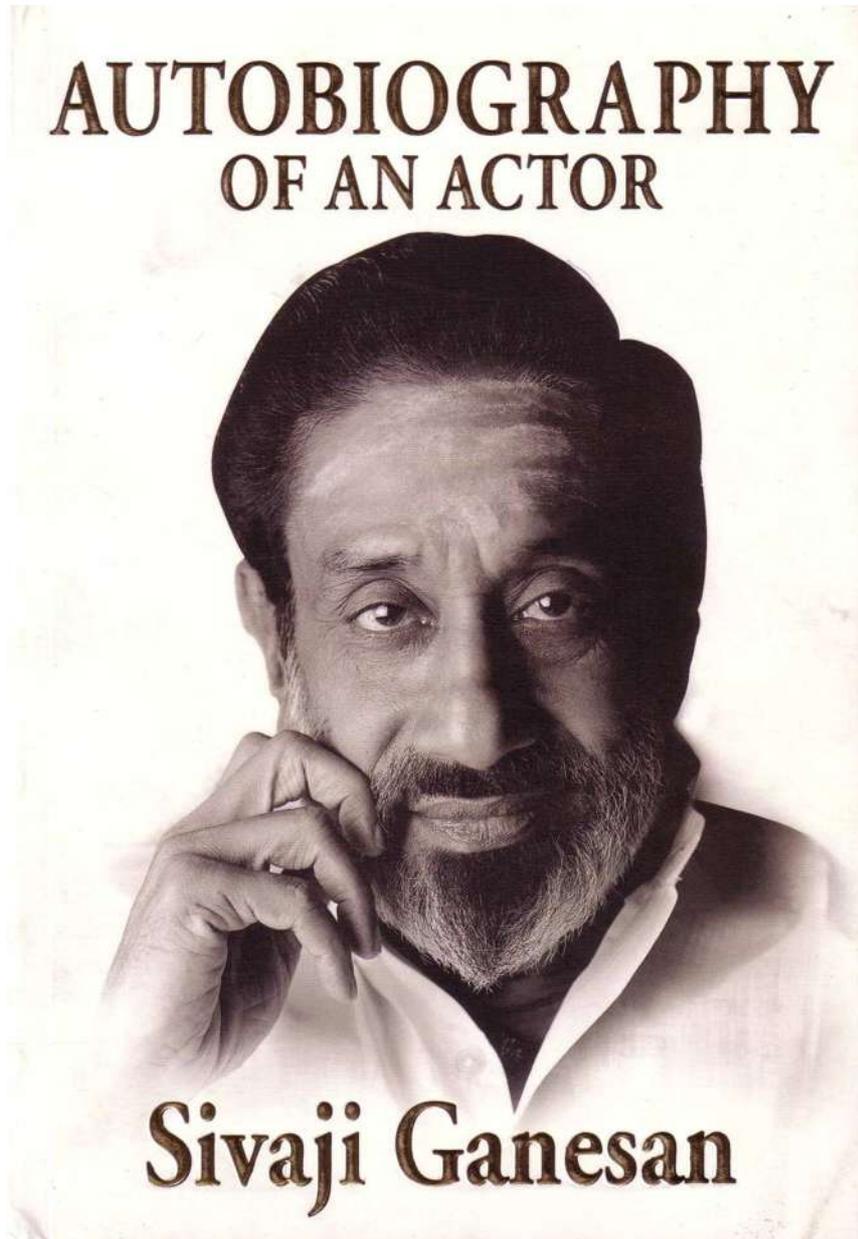
1959 January: DMK wins prominently at the Madras municipal council elections. DMK candidates won 45 seats (compared to Congress Party candidates winning 37 seats) for 100 seat assembly. Subsequently A.P. Arasu of DMK was elected as the mayor of Madras city. At the felicitation meeting held, Kannadasan was disillusioned with the recognition Karunanidhi received from the hands of Anna.

1959 February: At the general council meeting of DMK held in Puthukottai, E.V.K. Sampath (then ranked no. 2 in DMK hierarchy) accused Anna and Nedunchezhiyan for not spreading the party message to other three (Andhra, Kannada and Kerala) states.

1959 May 6: release of Veera Pandiya Kattabomman (Heroic Pandiya Kattabomman) movie, starring Sivaji Ganesan in the title role. A big success in box office.

1959 May 19: release of Sivagankai Seemai (Distant land of Sivagankai) movie, starring SSR, produced by Kannadasan; failure in box office.

1959 June 16: Left leg injury to MGR at the drama stage in Sirkazhi.



Sibling Rivalry and Siblicide among DMK Artistes

In early 1950s, DMK was promoted in prose, poetry and stage as a 'party of siblings', following the leadership of leader Annadurai; a play on the leader's personal name 'Anna' which means elder brother. As the above chronological synopsis indicates, generativity of DMK-affiliated artistes was unquestionable. But, such generativity also generated

rivalry, jealousy and distrust among the participants. As a consequence, siblicide became a factor in eliminating weaklings.

*Luckily, one can rely on the autobiographies of four principals – Kannadasan, MGR, Karunanidhi and Sivaji Ganesan – to learn about the inner currents which prevailed then. I have listed the four names in the chronological order they had recorded their versions. Truth has many shades, and one can infer what really happened by comparing notes. Reading these four autobiographies, one finds that MGR had **not mentioned** about the friction he had with Sivaji Ganesan, which led to latter leaving DMK fold in 1957. Not only MGR, even Karunanidhi (in his volume 1, which covers his life up to 1968) and Kannadasan do not mention this conflict with Sivaji Ganesan. In a subsequent volume, Karunanidhi had implied that it was MGR who worked ‘behind’ actively to push Sivaji Ganesan out of DMK.*

Sivaji Ganesan’s Gripe

I present Sivaji Ganesan’s version of truth, as he reminisced to his interviewer before his death.

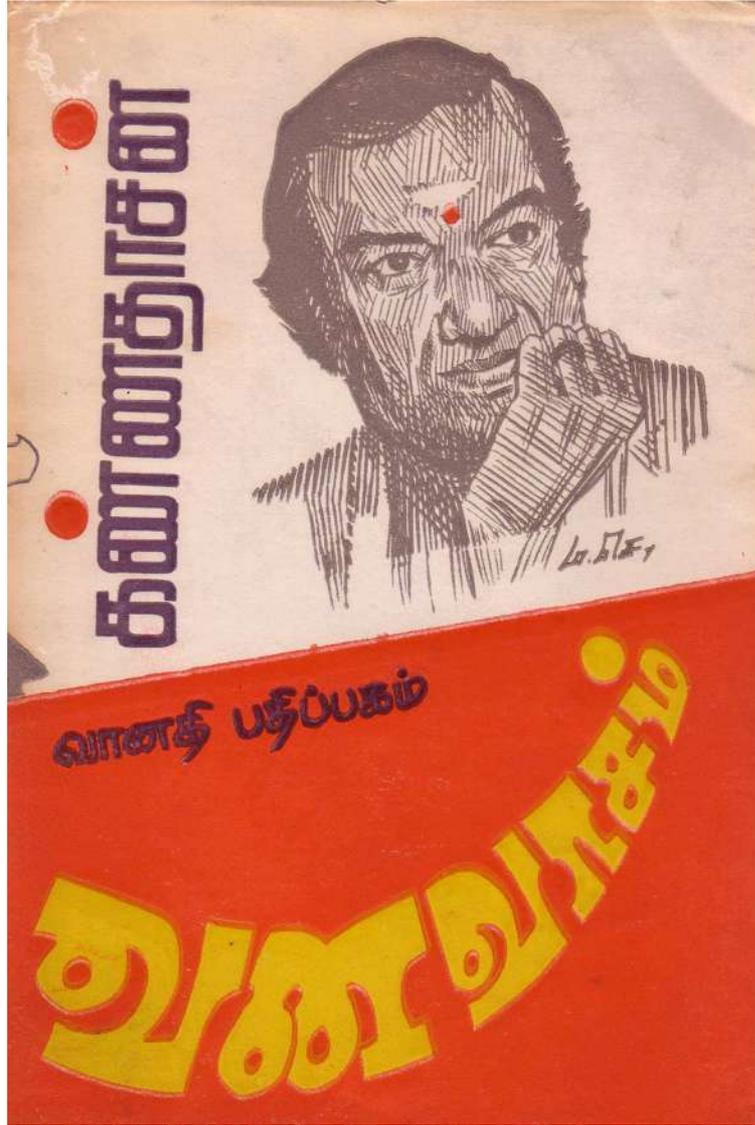
“...in 1956, the mother of all storms hit Tamil Nadu and disrupted normal life for many persons. Arignar Anna appealed to all of us to raise funds for flood relief. I raised funds in my individual capacity. I spoke the Parasakthi dialogue in Virudhunagar and collected the money that was placed on the cloth that I spread out for this purpose. The first to donate was a man from the Nadar community. I handed over the collections to the party and left for Salem for a shoot. Anna was conducting a function to felicitate the person who raised the maximum collection...I waited at home presuming that someone would telephone or invite me personally for the function but there was no communication. The function took place at six in the evening and for the first time MGR was called on stage and honoured. Such irony! It was I who had collected maximum funds, but the honour went to MGR. Anna had

apparently asked the party workers why I was not present and he was told that I was unable to make it! Some elements hovering around Anna wanted to send me away from him. Kalignar [i.e., Karunanidhi] was also present. We were so close, yet he was unable to insist that I be invited. Well! What could he do?

No one acknowledged my presence a fact which unsettled me. I had always been patient, and impervious to all insults but this incident drove me crazy. I had been part of this movement from the time I was very young, and without warning, I was dismissed as someone of no consequence and my anna MGR, admitted instead. He was not in the least bit connected with this movement at that point. They did this just to sideline me. This is the truth and I swear by it. Many were aware of these facts but for reasons best known to them kept the truth under wraps. I wish to disclose everything. This autobiography is like my last will, so I do not wish that anything be hidden.”

*In Sivaji Ganesan’s version, both MGR and Karunanidhi were mentioned. But, he had noted, MGR “was not in the least bit connected with this movement at that point.” That more or less leaves Karunanidhi as the plotter in this episode. There are two more issues which deserve consideration. First, Sivaji Ganesan’s autobiography also indicates that he “have never been a member of the DMK... **I accepted the principles for which the party stood, but did not become a member.**” May be, giving the benefit of doubt to Karunanidhi, (as Sivaji Ganesan had remained outside the party membership since Dec. 1949), MGR who had joined DMK and become a member in 1953, it could be argued that Sivaji Ganesan was eliminated from consideration on a technical point! Secondly, as indicated in the chronological synopsis above, MGR’s three released movies of 1956 had box office success. It could be that he might have donated more funds ‘silently’ to the party coffers without any publicity, as his philanthropy came to be recognized later, even by his enemies. Thus, MGR’s contributions came to be publicly acknowledged. One also finds it difficult to accept, that this particular insult of not receiving due recognition made Sivaji Ganesan so bitter with DMK*

hierarchy. After all, he was not a stranger to such insults in the cut-throat world of Tamil cinema, before the success of his debut movie Parasakthi in 1952. It is on record that notable producers of that era like A.V. Meiyappa Chettiar, S.S. Vasan, director P. Neelakandan and cameraman Jeeva had 'insulted' him with words such as one with 'horse face and fish mouth'!



Kannadasan autobiography vol. 1

Kannadasan's Troubles

Kannadasan did have serious sibling rivalry with Karunanidhi, since 1951. In his autobiography, Kannadasan had noted a few. He mentions that, in 1951 when he married second time (while his first wife, married in 1950, was alive), Karunanidhi had criticized him strongly, even though it was his personal affair. Karunanidhi also ordered him not to participate in the party conference. Kannadasan also mentions that in 1954, when the movie Illara Jothi starring Sivaji Ganesan was released, to which he had written the script, Karunanidhi had mixed 'a little poison' about him in his own journal, that a segment to that particular movie was scripted by himself (i.e, Karunanidhi). To this mischief, Kannadasan had mentioned that he delivered a zinger, comparing Karunanidhi to Shakespeare, with a caption 'Shakespeare gained fame by stealing'! This was after he (Kannadasan) had learnt that even Shakespeare's play plots were not original. Kannadasan mentioned that in those days, there was a common belief that the writings of Karunanidhi were not his own!

In the 1957 elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly, both SSR and Kannadasan lost. DMK didn't receive official party recognition then. The election records show, Kannadasan came third, contesting Tirukoshtiyur (constituency 99) as an Independent. He received 9,389 votes (20.15% votes polled), against the victor N.V. Chockalingam's (Congress Party) 20,611 votes (44.2% votes polled). In between these two, was the Communist Party candidate S. Shanmugam who polled 11,533 votes (24.75% votes polled). For this loss, Kannadasan blames his political naivete. Comparatively, SSR performed better, contesting Theni (constituency 134) as an Independent. He received 31,404 votes (21.9% polled) against the victor N. R. Thiagarajan (Congress Party) 38,185 votes (26.6%). In his autobiography, Karunanidhi had mentioned that the lack of a party symbol was a hindrance for the DMK candidates in that election. As 'rising sun' was an independent symbols, in some constituencies other Independent candidates not belonging to DMK had the same 'rising sun' symbol. Thus, it was difficult to ask for vote for the

'rising sun' symbol in some constituencies, and in other constituency (especially Salem, where DMK leader Nedunchezhiyan contested) another symbol had to be pleaded for voters. In that Salem constituency, Nedunchezhiyan contested under rooster symbol, as another independent candidate had received the 'rising sun' symbol.

To contest this 1957 election, Kannadasan had mentioned that he received a loan for 3,000 rupees. To retrieve this sum, he attempted to make a movie, having MGR in the hero role.

In his autobiography, Kannadasan adopted an unusual style, of referring himself in third person singular (he). Thus, depending on the context, in the translation of Kannadasan's story, 'he' appears to reflect himself (Kannadasan) and his acquaintances as well. To quote, "He wrote a story entitled, 'Oomaiyan Kottai' [Fort of a Dumb Man]. One well known actor of the party was his close friend. [note by Sachi: Kannadasan do not mention MGR by name; but it was an open secret.] It was wrong to belief that he (MGR) was also a friend in day job; because of friendship, he had made contract with him. Because both were friends, another friend was willing to finance. He talked that 'he would finish this movie, like that of his own'. But after two months, 62,000 rupees had been spent. The actor didn't offer call sheets. He didn't even talk to one's face. The movie stopped abruptly. The financier lost trust, and he filed a case."

Kannadasan continued his story further. I translate his story here, because he had provided real numbers for movie production costs during that period. "It was January 5th. The next morning, would be January 6th [1958]. On that day, DMK had planned to make Black Flag protest to Nehru. The news reached in Tiruchi on 5th that many had been arrested. He had received money and car. He feared that if he reach Chennai, he also would be arrested. He feared that those who lent money would distrust him. As such, rather than going to Chennai, he reached Bangalore. Only after the Black Flag protest events, he returned to Chennai. He wrote a poem about Black Flag protest, and escaped from the 'sin' of not participating in such a protest.

He had written a story based on Sarath Chandra's 'Chandranath' and titled it as 'Maalai idda Mangai' (A Virgin, who garlanded). With 17 songs, he produced as a movie. It was over within three months. It brought him success. But, as he had sold the rights to another guy, all the profit moved to him. Then, he produced a movie with the title 'Sivagankai Seemai' (Distant land of Sivagankai). [note by Sachi: The hero of this movie was SSR] There was pro and con debate during the production of this movie. He produced it, in confrontation with another movie [note by Sachi: That movie was Veera Pandiya Katta bomman, with Sivaji Ganesan in title role. There was bad blood between Sivaji Ganesan and Kannadasan then.] Though that movie was of some quality, it flopped in box office, relatively to its competing movie. Credit had increased from 62,000 (rupees) to 150,000 (rupees)."

After describing his conflict and dissatisfaction with Anna and Karunanidhi on how his efforts were ignored, following the 1959 Madras municipal council elections, Kannadasan had described his troubles as a third time producer. To quote, "Rather than the disgusting thing Annadurai did to him, what he did to himself was more disgusting! He produced his third movie, entitled, 'Kavalai Illatha Manithan' [A Man without any Troubles], as a shareholder. Uncomfortable mind. Couldn't think seriously without worries. Situation was that one had to produce a movie in borrowed money. His partner would sign carelessly without checking what's on the paper. Under these circumstances, he thought of something, but wrote another thing and produced it as a movie. All he had done for that movie was wrong. Troublesome story. Miscasting of actors... With all these complications, when the movie was released in September 1960, he became credit unworthy. He had lost, 590,000 rupees, in those days. Later, with interest, the amount ballooned to 700,000 rupees."

In sum, Kannadasan had antagonized Karunanidhi, Sivaji Ganesan and was not in good terms with MGR in late 1960s. Though I don't have documents in my hand, I have read that singer-actor K.R. Ramasamy (who was a favorite of Anna, and senior to Karunanidhi by 10 years)

was also sidelined in 1950s due to his conflict with Karunanidhi. Here is a tally, in which Karunanidhi had a dubious hand. Sivaji Ganesan quit his affiliation with DMK in 1957; K. R. Ramasamy was sidelined in DMK during late 1950s; Kannadasan quite DMK in 1961; SSR was sidelined in DMK during late 1960s; MGR was thrown out of DMK in 1972.

MGR and SSR in detention in January 1958

In his autobiography, MGR had described briefly about the time he spent in detention about that Black Flag protest event, which Kannadasan had deliberately avoided. Excerpts:

“That particular Black Flag demonstration was decided to criticize because [Nehru] had insulted Periyar’s [talk] as nonsense, and not for accepting the wishes of Tamilnadu people. Because, that demonstration was not directly decisive to nation’s welfare, artistes, lawyers and students were exempted from that protest. I returned home from shooting after midnight 12 o’ clock, and took notes for the next day’s shooting and went to bed around 2 am. I thought, I was being waked for next day’s shooting. Then only, I realized that it was the police personnel.

I asked him: ‘Where is thamby SSR? Where is Mr. KRR? Are you taking me to the place where they are? If so, I’m happy. ’ [Initials KRR refers to actor K.R. Ramasamy.] I was greeted with silence. I was taken to Mylapore police station. The officer there asked me to sit in a bench, and took care of his work. Not a word with me.

After a while, thamby SSR also arrived. Like me, he also had asked the same questions. “Where are Mr. KRR and MGR?”

Mr. K.Subramaniam, late director and one who treated me like his elder son, worried much and talked with Mr. Bakthavatsalam [then a cabinet minister in Kamaraj ministry] to release artistes like us. We received a message that we had to express our apology for participating in Black

Flag protest and hereafter we'll not take part in such a protest. We had informed that we cannot offer such apology. We also received again a message, that if our nearest kin can offer such an apology, it would suffice. Though we wished to contact our nearest kin, we couldn't contact them. Somehow, we were released next day afternoon."

Nehru's Firm Hand

M.J. Akbar, one of Nehru's biographer, noted that in late 1950s, Nehru's firmness on the question of Indian unity strengthened with time. Thus, by guile, Nehru deflated the separatists raising their heads in Kashmir (leader was Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah), Nagaland (leader was Zapu Phizo) and the then Madras state (leader Annadurai). As far as DMK was concerned, Nehru was lucky in that he had Congress Party (then led by K. Kamaraj) in power. Karunanidhi's ambition to raise himself to the top after Anna's demise notwithstanding, in hindsight, one may wonder whether a couple of bureaucratic officials in alliance with the Congress Party in power manipulated defections of E.V.K. Sampath and Kannadasan from DMK in 1961. Why I pose this question is because, Karunanidhi himself had alluded to such 'soft blackmailing' by Central government's tax officials dancing according to the whims of Indira Gandhi, in pulling MGR out of DMK in 1972. Creating friction between number One and number Two of rival parties has remained a time-tested Chanakyan or Machiavallian strategy of political enemies. To the best of my knowledge, positive evidence for such a defection to deflate secessionist tendencies in Tamil Nadu has not been offered, but M.J. Akbar alludes to such Nehruvian guile in the cases of Nagaland and Kashmir. Two specific facts do provide meager support to the 'soft blackmail' theory. First, Sambath was one of the two DMK MPs elected in 1957. Thus, Central government officials might have had easy access to him at New Delhi. Secondly, after leaving DMK in 1961, Sambath in association with Kannadasan, floated a short-lived Tamil National Party (TNP) for a while, but merged his party with the Congress Party within a few years.

Here is the comment, which I received from fellow MGR biographer and friend R. Kannan, for Part 22, on November 5th.

“Hello Sachi: I just finished part 22. Nicely done. You might have wished to record SSR and MGR showing up at the Vellore General Council meeting [of DMK] together from an adjacent room when Sampath gets into a situation. You may have wished to also mention that SSR did ‘Thanga rathnam’ as a propaganda film for the DMK in the 1969 polls. Also that SSR was one of Anna’s closest and had criticized MGR for his talk ‘Anna is my guide’ [delivered at a function, felicitating Kamarajar’s birthday].

I am trying to get hold of SSR’s autobio. I shall try to get two copies and send you one if possible...”

In the previous chapter, I noted the death of Sedapati Suryanarayana Thevar (SS) Rajendran (affectionately addressed as SSR by Tamilians all over) on October 24 at the age of 86. I also mentioned that “one can rely on the autobiographies of four principals – Kannadasan, MGR, Karunanidhi and Sivaji Ganesan – to learn about the inner currents which prevailed then” in DMK party. Now one can add that, we also have SSR’s ‘incomplete’ autobiography, Naan Vantha Pathai [The Path I had Trod, 2014] in Tamil, published just before his death. I plan to write a review of this book separately. I appreciate Kannan for his help in getting a copy of this book in time. Here, I include only two episodes SSR had described about MGR at the end.

The Quality called Charisma

In recent times, like other respectable words such as genius, legend and superstar, charisma (or charismatic) word also has received depreciation when journalist hacks began using it as an adjective indiscriminately to politicians. The Oxford English Dictionary defines charisma as, “Theol. Favour given, gift of grace. A free gift or favour specially vouchsafed by God; a grace, a talent”. It lists that one of the

earliest use of this word in English was by John Bulwer (1606-1656), an English physician and natural philosopher. In Bulwer's 1644 book, 'Chirologia and Chironomia', it appears as, "is used in the conveyance of that charisma or miraculous gift of healing." In its original sense of meaning, charismatic persons are understood to possess 'healing powers'.

In this chapter, I provide some thoughts on MGR and charisma. Even MGR's detractors and strong critics will agree that MGR had charisma in abundance. My focus was, when did he acquire such charisma? None of previous MGR's biographers (especially M.S. S. Pandian, in his snobbish criticism of MGR's movie and political career) had tackled this theme. Mohandas had occasionally springled the charisma word, in his portrayal of MGR. But, Mohandas's focus was mainly on MGR's last decade of his life, after MGR's ascension as the chief minister of Tamil Nadu state. To delve into charisma theme, one should study his contemporaries in Hollywood and India.

All were contemporaries of MGR. I have titled this chapter as 'camera lens and charisma'. The popular belief maybe that all movie stars were blessed with charisma, because camera lens blows up their physical features, in multiple angles and close-up shots of face. But, this need not be so. Thousands of actors have thrilled the cinema fans for nearly one hundred years. But, only a fraction of them exuded charisma. As a subjective exercise, to distinguish movie stars who had charisma and who didn't have charisma, I provide a select list who excelled themselves in Hollywood and in India.



SSR (lt) and MGR (rt) in their salad days

Charlie Chaplin had charisma, but W.C. Fields didn't have it. John Wayne had charisma, but Lee Van Cleef didn't have it. Marlon Brando had charisma, but Rod Steiger didn't have it. Katharine Hepburn had charisma, but Ava Gardner didn't have it. Ingrid Bergman had charisma, but Shelley Winters didn't have it. MGR had charisma, but his early rival T.R. Ramachandran (TRR) didn't have it! In fact, in mid-1940s, MGR used a variation of his name, M.G. Ramachandar, to

distinguish himself from TRR who had gained early fame as a hero in a 1941 movie Sabapathi. Later, within a time span of 15 years, after MGR had gained a firm foothold as a ranking hero in Tamil movie world, the same TRR played second fiddle to MGR as a comedian in the Bhagdad Thirudan (Baghdad Thief, 1960) movie.

Make no mistake. All the actors whom I have mentioned in the above paragraph were exceptionally talented, and all were professionals of top quality. Why some were blessed with charisma while others were unlucky is not easy to separate. Even those who had charisma did falter occasionally in their personal lives and relationships. They were immortals in their chosen art form, but mortals in their personal lives.

December 11th being the 10th death anniversary of M.S. Subbulakshmi, the renowned Carnatic music diva and actress, it is opportune to mention that MGR did act in a minor role in Subbulakshmi's last movie Meera (1945). Subbulakshmi was chronologically four months senior to MGR, and she outlived MGR by 17 years. When Meera was released, Subbulakshmi had charisma, but MGR didn't have it. Though a musician, Subbulakshmi acted in only four Tamil movies, between 1938 and 1945. These were, Sevasadanam (1938), Sakuntalai (1940), Savitri (1941) and Meera (1945). In the Sakuntalai movie, she paired with another super grade Carnatic musician, G.N. Balasubramaniam (GNB, for short). Unfortunately, GNB couldn't transfer his charisma from musical stage to the movie arena. The same pattern was seen among other reputed Carnatic musicians as well, such as V.V. Sadagopan (about whose talents, MGR was envious in 1939) and Nadaswaram expert T. N. Rajaratnam Pillai.

Here is the translation on what MGR wrote in his autobiography about his ill-luck in losing a movie role to Carnatic musician Veeravanallur Vedantam (V.V.) Sadagopan, who was 2 years chronologically senior to him. "Mr. V.V. Sadagopan had earned fame in acting as a hero in the movie 'Athirshdam' [Good Luck, 1939]. When one sees his smiling face, they wouldn't care to look at any others' smiles. Poets do praise the

teeth as pearls. That applies perfectly to the smile of Mr. Sadagopan. If one looks at his English-style suit and hat, they will ask, who can be this foreign actor. His chisel shaped body, handsome round face, attractive voice, musical skill as well as English knowledge with a B.A. degree. Will any fool reject such a personality like Mr. V.V. Sadagopan, in preference to another guy? How could I yearn for such a role? Couldn't I comprehend the difference from mountain and valley? After realizing this situation, I returned home that 'I will never get that role'. At home, I could only talk this disappointment to my mother. To whom else, I can share this? Even now, I find it difficult how she was able to manage this disappointment [of her son]."

Somehow, Lady Luck did smile at MGR seven years later. Sadagopan's career in Tamil movies folded abysmally, with only four movies, before MGR was offered the hero billing in 1947. Prior to his 1939 movie Athirshdam, Sadagopan had acted in a 1937 movie 'Nava Yuvan', for which some shooting was done in London! He did act as a hero in two 1941 movies 'Madanakamarajan' (Gemini banner's first production) and 'Venuganam'.

Thoughts of Max Weber and Edward Shils

Introduction of the charisma concept, as a sociological phenomenon, was attributed to German sociologist and philosopher Maximilian (Max) Weber (1864-1920). I provide some excerpts of interpretation of Weber's thoughts by American sociologist Edward Shils (1910-1995). In his 1965 paper, Shils offers the following description.

"Weber did not restrict his usage of 'charisma' to refer only to manifestations of divinity. He often used the term to refer to extraordinary individualities, i.e., powerful, ascendant, persistent, effectively expressive personalities who impose themselves on their environment by their exceptional courage, decisiveness, self-confidence, fluency, insight, energy etc., and who do not necessarily believe that they are working under divine inspiration."

Shils also informs that Weber viewed three patterns related to charisma. These were,



M.S. Subbulakshmi (lt) in 'Sevasadanam' (2) movie

*'kinship charisma' (Gentilcharisma), 'hereditary charisma (Erbscharisma) and 'charisma of office'(Amtscharisma). Another interesting thought expressed by Shils is that, "The disposition to attribute charisma is intimately related to the need for order. The attribution of charismatic qualities occurs in the presence of order-creating, order-disclosing, order-discovering power as such; it is a response to great ordering power." Then, in a foot-note following this sentence, Shils also stresses that **'Order-destroying power' itself can earn charisma.** This explains, why pioneer freedom fighters gain charisma. Examples include George Washington, Vladimir Lenin, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and V. Prabhakaran. In Shils's words, "Order-destroying power, great capacity for violence, attracts too, and arouses the charismatic propensity. It does so because it promises in some instance, to provide a new and better order, one more harmonious with the more inclusive and deeper order of existence."*

It is my impression that MGR probably earned charisma in Tamil movies, by destroying the then prevailing order! I offer four reasons. First, until early 1950s, heroines were paid a higher salary in South Indian cinema in comparison to that of heroes. Even MGR had written in his autobiography, that his then love interest and later to become 3rd wife (V.N. Janaki) was earning higher salary than him. Powerful performances by MGR and Sivaji Ganesan in 1952, reversed this salary disparity between heroes and heroines. Secondly, MGR facilitated the abandoning of singer-heroes generation in Tamil movies. His mentor in stage, P.U. Chinnappa died prematurely in 1951. Chinnappa's co-equal hero M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar lost his glamor after serving a prison sentence in the second half of 1940s, and showed aging. The third singer-hero of Tamil movies, T.R. Mahalingam, self-destructed himself in attempting to become a producer. Thirdly, preaching self-reliance for social uplift via meaningful songs became MGR's primary mode of teaching. Fourthly, even in choosing 'politically correct' titles of his movies, MGR had his last word. He wouldn't want to have a title which splashes arrogance, or on socially ill-respected themes or characters. His movie titles had to be positively clean. Ravindar, who was one of

MGR's script writers, mentions an anecdote about a movie title. 'The Man Who Knew too Much' was a well-known Alfred Hitchcock vehicle, produced twice in 1934 and 1956. When the plot of this movie was adopted for an MGR movie, Ravindar mentions that to fit the original story, they titled it as 'Ellam Arintha Manithan (All Knowing Man)'. MGR over-ruled this title as "too pompous. We don't need such a big name. Why not change it to, Aasai Muham (Lovely Face)".

Taxonomy of Charisma

Why is it, charisma couldn't be transferred from one area to another, like the Tamil musicians I've cited above. This applies to MGR's illustrious contemporary in stage-movie and political arenas, Sivaji Ganesan (aka V.C. Ganesan) too. Sivaji Ganesan was blessed with charisma in cinema, but he couldn't transfer such charisma to politics. MGR seems to be the only actor-politician who was able to transfer his charisma from movies to politics. Compare MGR's case with that of Hollywood actor-politician, President Ronald Reagan. The 40th President of USA was not at all a charismatic actor, compared to his contemporaries like Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Stewart and Marlon Brando. But, in politics, Reagan did gain charisma.

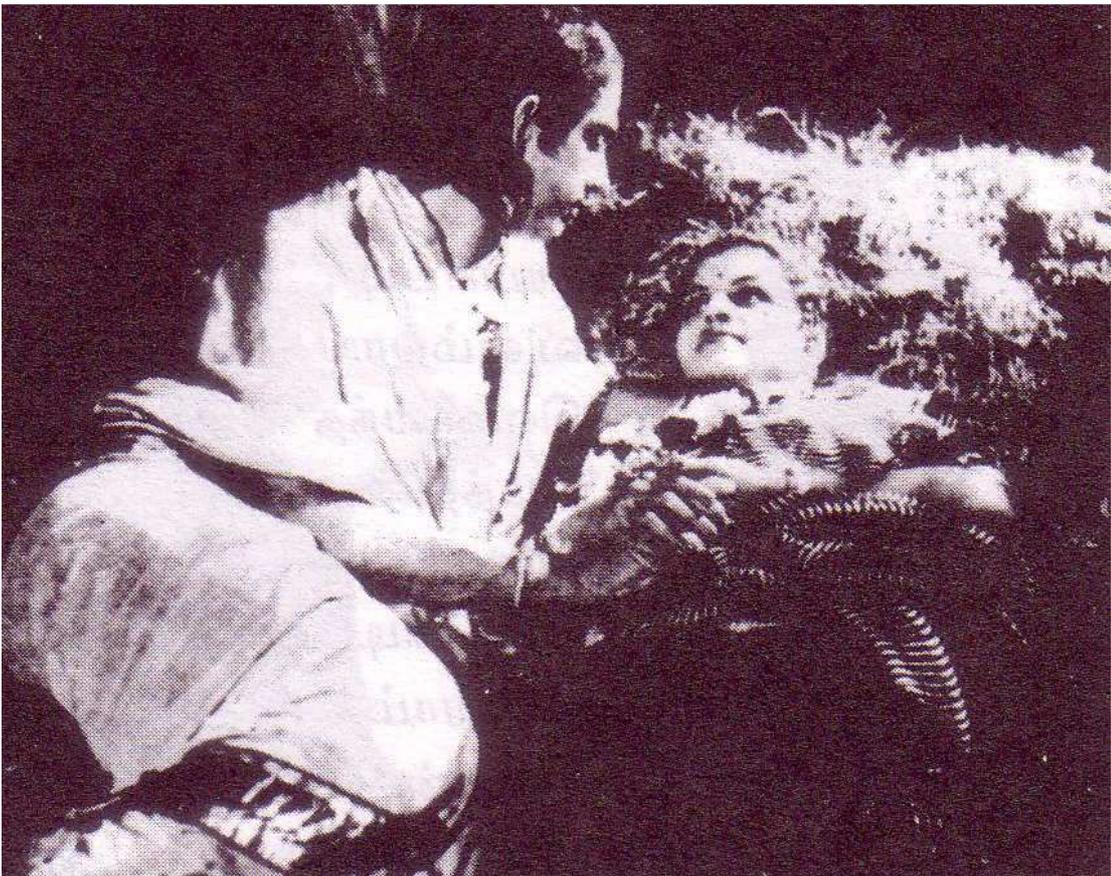
To the best of my knowledge, there is no taxonomy of charisma in the sociological literature. To confirm this fact, today (Dec.11, 2014), I checked the Web of Science database (<http://apps.webofknowledge.com/>), with keyword 'charisma'. There were 1,808 entries. When, I linked keywords 'charisma' and 'taxonomy', only 5 research papers turned up. I was able to read the complete text of 4 of these. Even among these five, 2 were focused on orchids and mammals, but not on humans! In the absence of such a charisma taxonomy, I offer below my thoughts.

1. **Fair, Transferable charisma** (from one field to another field). MGR and his mentor Anna were good examples, in transferring their charisma

from movies to politics (MGR) and politics to movies (Anna). M.S. Subbulakshmi was adept in transferring her charisma from music to movies.

2. **Fair, Un-transferable charisma** (*charisma limited to one field of expertise*). Sivaji Ganesan couldn't transfer his charisma from movies to politics. The same with poet Kannadasan too.
3. **Reflective charisma** (*charisma gained by association with a charismatic person*). Jayalalitha (*in association with MGR*) and Karunanidhi (*in association with Anna*) are good examples. Karunanidhi-brand charisma is pitiable. He did earn charisma in the drama-cinema field as a stylist of his own. But, in politics, he lost most of it due to his vainglorious character.
4. **Belatedly recognized charisma**. This could be separated into two types. Type 1: *Sunset of life charisma* (Nelson Mandela was a good example. Until he was released from prison in 1990, none considered him as charismatic.) Type 2: *Posthumous charisma – attained after death*. (Jesus Christ, Alfred Nobel, artist Vincent van Gogh, computer scientist Alan Turing and Tamil poet Subramanya Bharathi are good examples.)
5. **Foul charisma**: *a loathsome charisma offensive to the senses majority of humans. Many examples abound. Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, Al Capone, Hugh Hefner, Madonna (pop icon).*
6. **Epsilon charisma (or Ephemeral charisma)**: *bare charisma or literally lasting only for a day or few days. I'd identify betrayers of benefactors in this category, beginning from Brutus, Cassius and Judas Iscariot. They do satisfy one trait of charisma holders – that of originality in a deed.*
7. **Pseudo-charisma (or Hyped charisma)**; *Many contemporary politicians, like President Bill Clinton, are tagged by favor-seeking journalists as charismatic. One wonders, what did Mr. Clinton achieve (other than winning two presidential elections) either politically or intellectually to become charismatic?*
8. **Non-charisma**: *Examples abound among politicians. Some of my favorites are, Richard Nixon, Morarji Desai, Junius Jayewardene, Subramanian Swamy, Palaniappan Chidambaram.*

I have observed that all the UN Secretary Generals elected by the General Assembly (8, since 1946) are non-charismatic. These are, Trygve Lie, Dag Hammarskjold, U Thant, Kurt Waldheim, Javier Perez de Cuellar, Boutros-Ghali, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-Moon. Why is it so? These guys don't have any original thinking on their own. They merely act as a super grade peon of Super Powers.



M.S. Subbulakshmi (rt) in 'Sakuntalai' (2) movie

Primary Traits of Charismatic Persons

Charismatic persons can be identified with following primary traits. (1) Originality in deeds, (2) humility in action, (3) Apportioning due credit to fellow associates, and (4) risk taking attitude. SSR, in his

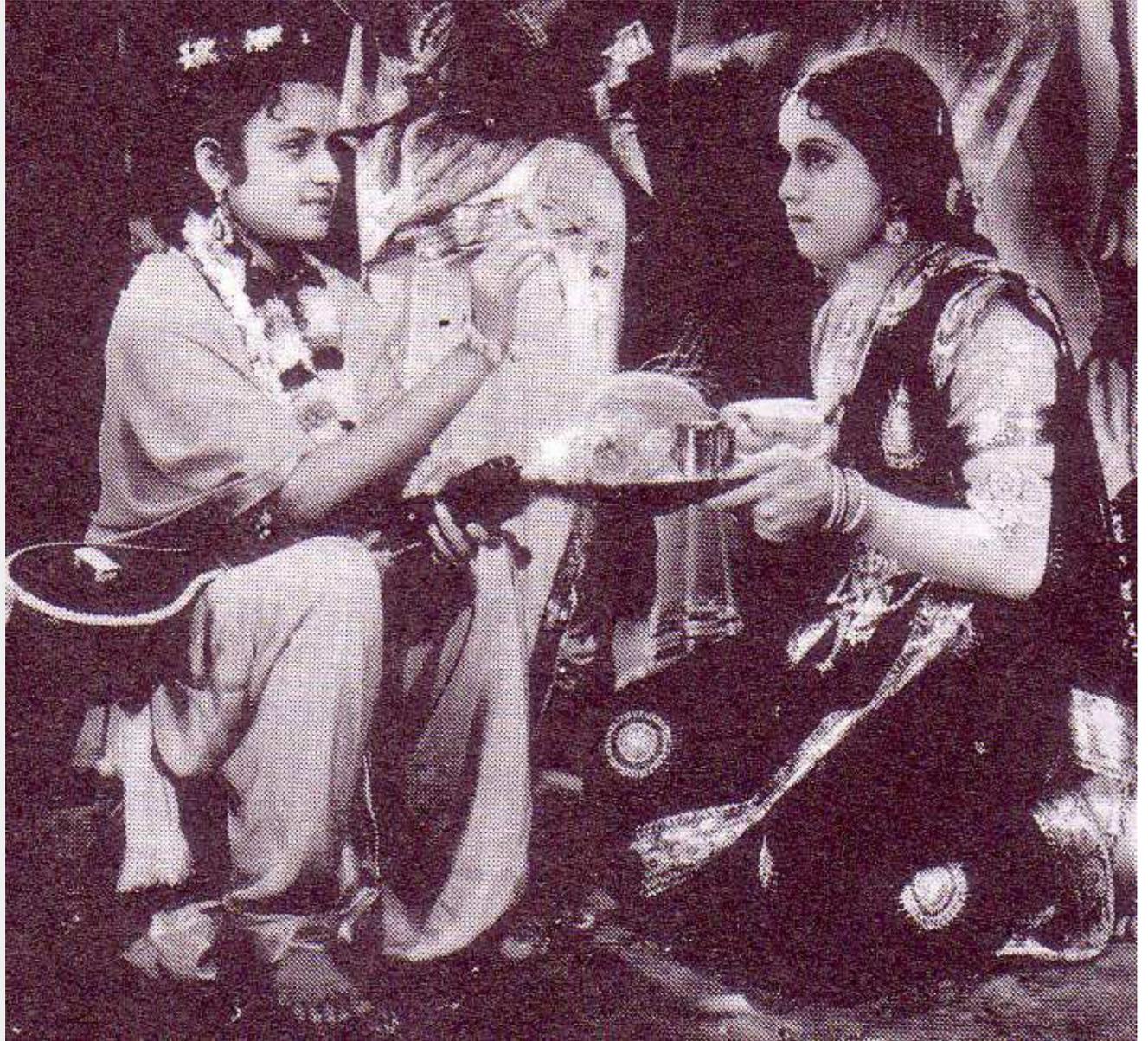
autobiography, includes two sample episodes about his interaction with MGR, which attest to the latter's humility. I translate them here.

Episode 1: *“On January 1958, when Prime Minister Nehru chided the actions of Periyar (E.V. Ramasamy Naiker) and other Tamilnadu leaders as ‘nonsense’, Anna, as the leader of Kazhagam, demanded that we should make protest to Nehru by showing black flags. Anna solicited the help of all Kazhagam enthusiasts to gather at the Chennai airport, so that when Nehru landed, he should see only the black flags. In those days, Kazhagam didn't have much finance. During such protest situations, annan MGR and I are the ones who took major responsibility. MGR Pictures and SSR Pictures owned by us owned sewing machines. Therefore, day and night, [we] prepared many black flags and other protest-related minutiae....We were taken to Central Jail, and lodged in First Floor, First class room. It was First class room only in name; but it was very small. There was a dirty mattress full of lice to sleep. We used our own hands pillows and slept in the floor.*

Next day, at noon, we were offered food. I found it difficult to eat what was served as rice in a small aluminum plate. I looked at MGR. He wasn't bothered at all. He quipped, ‘In my young days, I had eaten food like this. So, this is not at all new for me.’ A mud pot was also placed. And next to it, there was a tin can, for drinking water. Adjacent to these, there were two additional mud pots too. I asked him, ‘What are these for?’ He said, ‘Those are for our excretory functions.’ I felt so uncomfortable, and asked him, ‘How can we use these?’ His nonchalant response was, ‘Like this, in the same room there are five or six convicts spending time. Think about their situation!’...

Before we left the jail room, annan MGR told, ‘We should keep in mind the real situation we experienced here. Until now, in the cinema, we had depicted the jails as comfortable places. Hereafter, in our movies, we had to present the reality. Then only, people will realize the ugliness of jail.’ ”

Episode 2: *“During the 1980 Legislative Assembly election for Tamil Nadu, annan MGR asked me to contest a constituency. I responded, ‘I don’t think so, anne! I’ll take part in the election propaganda meetings. For this, his response was, ‘Suppose, in case our party couldn’t win enough to become a ruling party, we need a responsible person in the Opposition benches to speak louder.’ I thought – that was his strength. If we believe that, we will win, we will not actively work for it. In case, if we doubt that we may lose, then our Anna DMK supporters will contribute their efforts day and night even on the verge of starving and will bring victory for our party, was his firm believe, I sensed.”*



M.S. Subbulakshmi (lt) in 'Savitri' (2) movie

M.S. S. Pandian, one of MGR's early biographers, died last month (Nov. 10), at the age of 57. Though he had been eulogized as "an eminent social scientist who wrote extensively on the Dravidian Movement, south Indian politics, cinema..." in the Indian media, I had felt that his study of MGR's career is utterly biased. In reviewing Pandian's work, another MGR observer Robert Hardgrave Jr. made the following perceptive comments:

“With the Marxian perspective of Gramsci and in the language of post-modernism, Pandian examines various elements of the cinematic image of MGR and its ‘embeddedness’ in the cultural idioms of Tamilnadu; how this screen image was transferred to politics through the ‘constructed biographies’ of MGR; and, less successfully, the relationship of the material condition of the subaltern classes to the rise of the MGR phenomenon. Pandian’s use of Gramsci’s concept of ‘common sense’ is neither illuminating nor successful in explaining how MGR produced ‘consent among the subaltern classes,’ but Pandian nevertheless provides a fascinating and revealing analysis of MGR in film and the ‘filmy politics’ in Tamilnadu.”

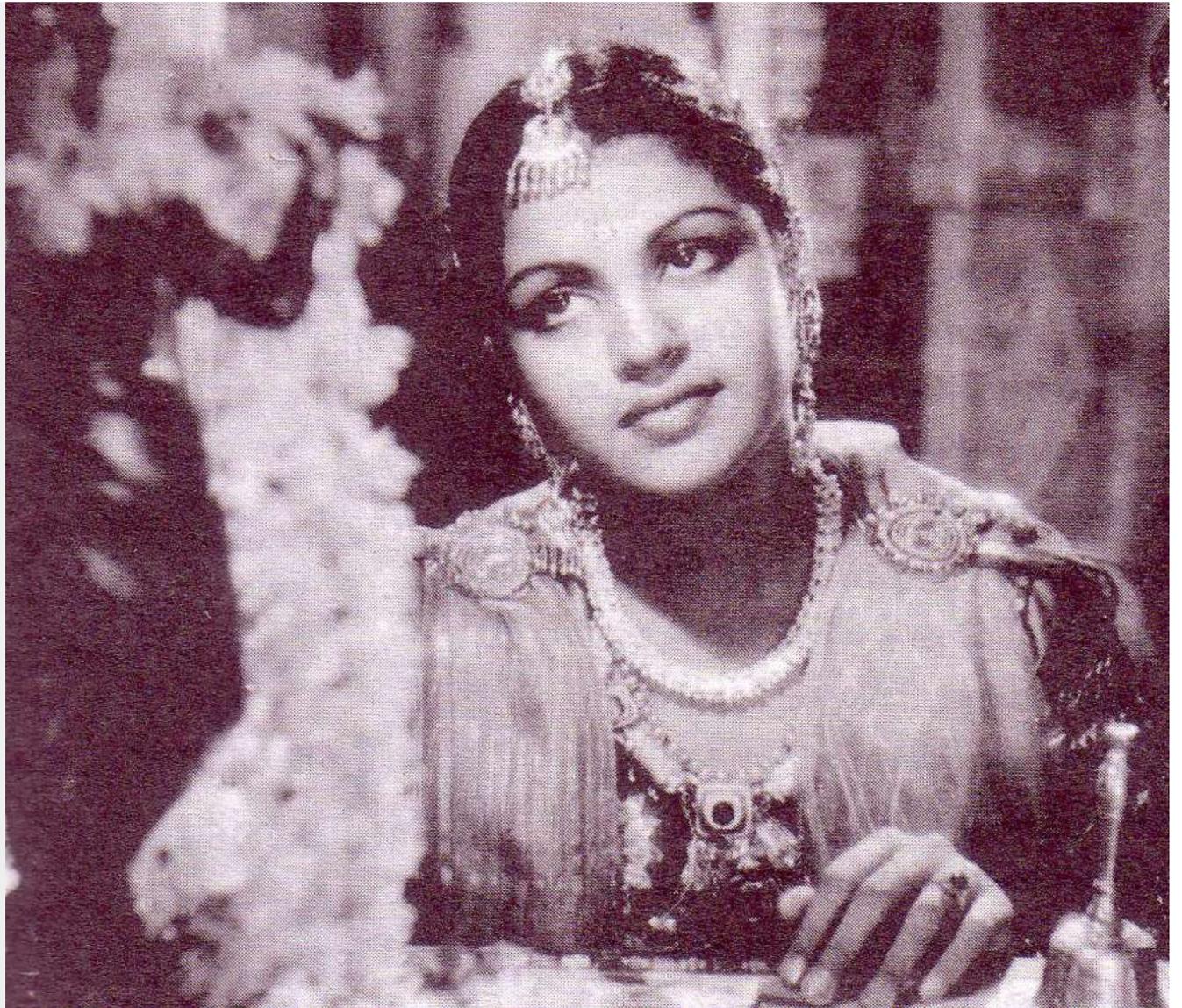
Even the TamilNet website provided an obituary note about Professor Pandian, mentioning that he was an enthusiast for separate state Eelam. But, to many Eelam Tamils’ dismay, Pandian never bothered to write an appreciative sentence on MGR’s strong support for Eelam campaign, in his biased tract on MGR. That tells something about the scholastic attitude of Marxist scholars!

Bertrand Russell, in his sociological analysis of power, infers the following.

“If I had to select four men who have had more power than any others, I should mention Buddha and Christ, Pythagoras and Galileo. No one of these four had the support of the State until after his propaganda had achieved a great measure of success. No one of the four had much success in his own life time. No one of the four would have affected human life as he has done if power had been his primary object. (Italics, as in the original.)

Though Russell don’t use charisma word, it is indirectly implied that the four individuals (Pythagoras, 571 BC- 495 BC; Buddha, 563 BC-483 BC; Jesus Christ, 7-4 BC – AD 30-33; and Galilei Galileo, 1564-1642) he mentioned exuded posthumous charisma, in exercising their power over the illiterate masses. But, one should not forget, that all four individuals lived in an era where mass media was not a factor of

influence in daily lives. Of course, there was no camera to portray their physical features. Also, in the times of these four charismatic individuals, long distance travel was unthinkable. While they were living, their perceived influence on followers were marginal at best, or negligible at worst. Compared to these four, MGR living in the 20th century, had ample mass media coverage and did exercise his power/influence over 50 million individuals for nearly three decades.



M.S. Subbulakshmi in 'Meera'(2) movie