

# THE HINDU

Online edition of India's National Newspaper

Friday, Sep 08, 2006

## **A leader and a visionary**

M. L. NARASIMHAM

From struggling to make ends meet in Mumbai to having a postage stamp issued in his honour, L.V. Prasad's is a life out of the ordinary.

**L.V. Prasad had the rare distinction of acting in the first talkie films of three languages.**



**MAN OF MANY PARTS L.V. Prasad.**

**Bombay 1930:** At the dawn of the New Year, a lanky young man of 22, from a remote village in Andhra Pradesh alighted from a third class compartment at the Victoria Terminus. What brought him this far was his burning desire to make it big in films. He neither knew the language nor anyone in the Mecca of Indian cinema. Hoping to find a job at Kohinoor Film Company Studios, Dadar, he stood at the entrance peeping through the closed zinc doors for days together.

**Madras 1956:** Aspiring youngsters wait at the entrance hoping to catch his attention as he enters his own studio complex. In a nutshell, this is the success story of Akkineni Lakshmi Varaprasada Rao better known as L.V. Prasad. But then, it wasn't a cakewalk for the thespian.

### **A long journey**

Like many aspiring actors, he too nurtured a wish to become a movie star and boarded a train to Bombay with just Rs. 100 in his pocket. He sneaked out of his house leaving behind his wife Soundarya Manoharamma and a toddler daughter. For 21 months, they did not know his whereabouts. Nor was he aware that he had lost his daughter. When nothing happened at the Kohinoor Studio gates and he was robbed of most of his money, he took shelter at a tailor's shop opposite the studios. The tailor got him a job in Venus Pictures but the company neither made any movie nor paid him. He worked during the evenings in a carnival for a salary of Rs. 1.50 per day, acted in bit roles in silent films and did odd jobs of carrying reflectors and camera stands.

He then joined Ardeshir Irani's Imperial Film Company and acted in bit roles in Alam Ara (1931), India's first talkie. H. M. Reddy was an assistant director with Irani then. The same year Irani produced the first Telugu talkie Bhaktha Prahlada and the first Tamil talkie Kalidas, both directed by H. M. Reddy. As a company employee, Prasad had acted in both the talkies, as Chandaamarkulu and temple priest respectively. Thus he had the rare distinction of acting in the first talkie films of the three languages.



**L.V. Prasad directing actress Bhanumati in 'Rani'**

Veteran film historian 'Film News' Anandan narrates an interesting anecdote: "Though Kalidas is called the first Tamil talkie, the hero spoke in Telugu, the heroine in Tamil and L.V. Prasad in Hindi. The film was made in hurry and ran to about 6,000 ft. A review of the film appeared in a local daily prior to its release and shows that press shows were in vogue even then." At the Imperial Film Company, a lazy clerk in charge of the junior actors' roll call shortened his name as L.V. Prasad, which struck. When Imperial Film Company retrenched its employees, Prasad found himself working as a ticket collector at Dreamland Theatre. Interestingly, in 1970, Prasad celebrated the silver jubilee run of his home production, Khilona, at the same theatre.

Prasad donned many roles in Bombay - actor, gatekeeper, film representative, production manager, assistant cameraman and an assistant director.

In 1940, Prasad boarded a third class compartment, this time towards Madras. H. M. Reddy invited him to join as an assistant director for Satyame Jayam and Tenali Ramakrishna. Prasad acted in both the films besides working as an assistant director. He then returned to Bombay at the request of Tandra Subrahmanya Sastry to direct the film Kashta Jeevi, Anjali Devi's first film as heroine. But the film never got completed. Prasad stayed back in Bombay and worked as an assistant director for a few films, wrote the script for Devar and acted in plays by Prithvi Theatres. The never-say-die attitude helped Prasad to face dramatic changes in life.

In 1945, Prasad returned to Madras at the invitation of K.S. Prakasa Rao to direct and act in Gruhapravesam, which turned out to be a big hit. Successful films followed: Palnati Yudham, Drohi (he was the hero too), Manadesam that introduced N.T. Rama Rao, Vijaya's big hits, Shavukaru, Pelli Chesi Choodu (Kalyanam Panni Paar in Tamil), Missamma (Missiamma in Tamil), Appu chesi pappu koodu (Kadanvangi Kalyanam in Tamil) and Samsaram with N.T. Rama Rao and A. Nageswara Rao, their first film together and the landmark film in Sivaji Ganesan's career, Manohara in three languages - Tamil, Telugu and Hindi (Manohar).

"While Manohara was half way through, its Tamil version dialogue writer Kalaingar Karunanidhi was jailed due to political reasons. Acharya Athreya was writing the Telugu version's dialogue. At the insistence of L.V. Prasad, Athreya used to go to jail and discuss the dialogues for the remaining portions with Karunanidhi. The film was a huge hit in all the three languages," recalls Anandan.



**and Gemini Ganesan in 'Miss Mary'.**

In 1955, Prasad took possession of an unfinished studio in Madras and named it Prasad Studios.

This year Prasad Productions celebrates its Golden Jubilee. If Prasad first appeared on screen in 1931, fifty years later he made his last screen appearance in a major role in Raja Parvai (Amavasya Chandrudu in Telugu).'

A humble and simple man, Prasad had given liberal donation to found the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute at Hyderabad. He made Prasad Studios a house of excellence. His son Ramesh Prasad has carried on the legacy by making it the best in the country.

Hyderabad 2006: India Posts has honoured L.V. Prasad by issuing a special stamp in his memory. Legends are not born. History turns achievers into legends.