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A leader and a visionary

TRIBUTE 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.

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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. 150 per day, acted in bit roles in silent films and did odd jobs of carrying reflectors and camera stands. Junior actors in those days were expected to do such odd jobs or face expulsion.

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.

Veteran film historian 'Film News' Anandan narrates an interesting anecdote: "Though *Kalidas* is called the first Tamil

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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.

Train to Madras

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 *Kashita 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 founded by Prithvi Raj Kapoor. 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 Chesu Choodu* (*Kalyanam Panni Paar* in Tamil), *Missamma* (*Missamma* in Tamil), *Appu chesi pappu koodu* (*Kadanvangi Kalyanam* in Tamil) and *Samsa-*



MAN OF MANY PARTS (Clockwise from top) On the sets of 'Pelli Chesu Choodu', L.V. Prasad directing Bhanumati in 'Rani', directing Gemini Ganesan in 'Miss Mary', and in conversation with Rati Agnihotri.

ram 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 Kalaignar 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.

In 1955, Prasad took possession of an unfinished studio in Madras and named it Prasad Studios. The same year, he made *Ilavelpu*. In 1956 he started Prasad Productions (P) Ltd., and produced his first Hindi film, *Sharada*. Some of his other Hindi films include *Chote Be-*



Filmography

Apart from being one of the most popular directors and producers of his time, L.V. Prasad has also acted and assisted a number of filmmakers. Here are a few:

Actor

Star of the east (Silent) - Incomplete
1931 Alam Ara - First Hindi Talkie
1931 Kalidas - First Tamil Talkie
1931 Bhaktha Prahlada - First Telugu Talkie
1933 Sita Swayamvar (Hindi)
1940 Bondam Pelli (Telugu)
1940 Chaduvukunna Bharya (Telugu)
1982 Raaja Parvai (Tamil)

Assistant director and actor

1941 Tenali Ramakrishna
1942 Gharana Dhonga (Telugu)

Camera assistant

1938 Stree (Hindi)

Assistant director

1931 Kamar-Al-Zaman (Silent)
1941 Darpan (Hindi)
1943 Dawal (Hindi)
1944 Lady Doctor (Hindi)

Actor and director

1946 Gruha Pravesham (Telugu)
1947 Palnati Yuddham (Telugu)
1948 Drohi (Telugu)
1953 Pempudu Koduku (Telugu)

First few films as director

Kashita Jeevi (Telugu) - Abandoned
1949 Manadesam (Telugu)
1950 Shavukaru (Telugu)
1950 Samsaram (Telugu)
1952 Kalyanam Panni Paar (Tamil)

han, *Jeene Ki Raah*, *Miss Mary*, *Raja Aur Rank*, *Milan*, *Sasural*, *Humraahi*, *Swati* and *Ek Duje Ke Liye* were some of the other films he made in Hindi. Besides, he produced and directed films in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. 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). He was a recipient of the pres-

tigious Dada Saheb Phalke Award (1982) and the Andhra Pradesh Government's Raghupathi Venkayya award (1980). The Andhra University conferred on him the 'Kalaprapoorna' (1985) and the Tamil Nadu Government the Raja Sandow Award (1981).

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. Every aspiring actor/producer/director/technician must know about the life of such legends to benefit from their experiences. L.V. Prasad is one such.