



*L.V.Prasad and his wife Soundarya Manoharamma*

## The Prasad Story

Akkineni Lakshmi Varaprasada Rao was born on 17th January in the year 1908 as the second son to Akkineni Sriramulu and Basavamma in a



remote village, Somavarapadu, in Eluru Taluk in the State of Andhra Pradesh in India. Born into an agricultural family Prasad was a pampered child, very intelligent but never interested in studies.

Prasad was drawn by the drums of the touring theatres and drama troupes. Old and worn out film prints used to be shown in ramshackle tents and Prasad used to regularly rush to watch them. He also used to do small roles in the local dramas regularly. This was the passion that drove his life – the passion for acting and the moving image.

At the age of 17, in the year 1924, he got married to his maternal uncle's daughter Soundarya Manoharamma in a truly cinematic style and atmosphere. Soon they had a baby girl. Prasad's father was finding the going tough due to mounting debts and was forced to declare insolvency plunging the family into a deep state of depression and humiliation. This was the time when Prasad thought about his acting prowess to make a career and Prasad left his village, without telling anyone, one day with 100 rupees in his pocket!

Prasad had heard of a studio called Kohinoor in Dadar where cinemas are made and artists



congregate. On the cold winter morning on the new year's day of the year 1930 Prasad alighted at Dadar. As he set up his lodging in Ramakrishna Lodge he realized that his dream of being in films is not going to be easy to achieve. To top it he spoke neither Hindi nor English. He tried to convey his ambition to many using his sketchy English vocabulary to no avail. He was unable to gain entry into the studios and looked at another option – peering through the holes in the zinc sheets that made the fencing for the Kohinoor Studios. He used to watch for hours together with his eyes glued to these holes.

Opposite the Kohinoor studios there was a tailor's shop frequented by the stars and Prasad used to stand and watch them come and go. The tailor had been noticing Prasad's dedication in peering through the holes in the fence and understood his passion for films. But the visiting stars found Prasad's ambitions funny and merely laughed and made fun. Undaunted, Prasad continued to frequent the tailor shop for he was with cinema people here and he was enjoying it. A few days later he returned to his room to find his trunk broken open and whatever little money that was left was stolen.

But the kind hearted thief had left a little money and a note suggesting him to go back to his village with the money. He left the hotel with his trunk and returned to pursue his interest to enter the studio. The tailor was now quite intrigued to see him with his trunk and inquired. After listening to Prasad's story he suggested Prasad to stay in his shop, clean the place daily, set up his hookah and start looking for a job later. Though Prasad's ambitions seemed to be going



farther every day he somehow landed a errand boy's job in Venus Film Company and here he met a Punjabi youth called Dharilal. Venus neither made any films nor did Prasad get his wages. Dharilal got Prasad a job in a carnival to do a little bit of acting- basically talking and enticing people to visit the games. He then joined India Pictures as an errand boy where Akthar Nawaz cast him in a bit role in the silent film 'Star of the East'. The film was never released.

Dharilal's sister Moti was working in Imperial Film Company and she got Prasad a bit role in Ardeshir Irani's 'Alam Ara' the first India Talkie Cinema released in 1931. Prasad was paid a monthly wage of Rs.30/- for his role in Alam Ara and also to do bit roles wherever required as a pandit, chowkidhar and so on. In Imperial he met H.M.Reddy who had left his police

inspector job to try his luck in films. H.M.Reddy gave Prasad a small role in Kalidas, the first Tamil Talkie and subsequently in Baktha Prahalada, the first Telugu Talkie. An excited Prasad dispatched a telegram home, where by now everyone had given him up for dead. He took a train to his native village to tell about his success where he was given the bad news of his little daughter's death. He returned to Bombay with his wife where his first son Anand and later Ramesh were born.

Prasad by chance got a role as an assistant director in Kamar – Al – Zaman directed by Ali Shah. This was also the time Prasad saw his name being shortened from Akkineni Lakshmi Varaprasad Rao to L.V.Prasad by a clerk taking



attendance who found the name too long to utter. This name stuck with him forever.

Imperial had to retrench people and Prasad was left jobless. Things had not improved for him in the past 8 years, but for some acting, a little bit of assistance in directing and some odd roles. He decided to leave Bombay with his family to his native place with an intention of raising some funds from known people and start his own production company. This did not work. One day when he was desperate, a telegram came from H.M.Reddy to act in Rohini Pictures Grihalakshmi. He left for Madras and life changed. He made impact in H.M.Reddy's Tenali Ramakrishna and Gharana Dhonga. World War

It was at its peak and the Japanese bombed Madras forcing many to migrate. H.M.Reddy left for Pune with his family and Prasad had to return to his native place. He was deeply depressed now since he found himself a misfit for any job other than cinema. Tantra Subrahmanyam assigned him a job of a production supervisor and assistant director for the film 'Kashta Jeevi' which took him to Bombay again. The film was abandoned after shooting three reels. Prasad was in no mood to leave now and he got a job as assistant director in a few other films. During this time using his connections with Prithviraj Kapoor he joined Prithvi Theatres and satisfied his acting passion. It was during this time that he met Raj Kapoor, the hero of his first Hindi production 'Sharada'. Though L.V.Prasad was now comfortable the yearning to achieve greater heights made him restless.

In 1943 he got the opportunity to take on the responsibility of assistant director for Gruha Pravesham. Due to circumstances he became the director of the film and then he was also



chosen as the hero of the film! Gruha Pravesham, released in 1946 was one of the finest films of the forties and went on to become a classic of the period. After this K.S.Prakasha Rao offered Prasad an important role in 'Drohi'. During this time Ramabrahmam was facing difficulty in finishing his film 'Palnatti Yudhdham' due to ill health and he chose Prasad to do justice to this film. After this in 1949, Prasad directed Mana Desam and introduced N.T.Rama Rao,

later to become a legend in telugu cinema, in a minor role.



In 1950 Vijaya Pictures released their first film 'Shavukkaru' establishing L.V.Prasad as a great director. N.T.Rama Rao became a hero in Shavukkaru and Janaki the heroine, climbed to fame to become known as 'Shavukkar Janaki'. Samsaram released in the same year

brought together the two legends of the telugu film industry as brothers – N.T.Rama Rao and A.Nageswara Rao in a social drama which created records wherever it was released. The film provided a model for later film makers, a model and theme relevant and popular amongst film makers even today. After this success chased him. He directed some memorable films in the fifties all of them known for their drama and fine humour. 'Rani' a hindi film took him to



Bombay again and after that Jupiter Films engaged L.V.Prasad to direct their Magnum Opus Manohara starring the legendary Shivaji Ganesan in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. This film elevated Shivaji Ganesan to the greatest heights of



stardom. In the mid fifties the industrialist in L.V.Prasad came into being and he purchased a plot offered by Ranganadhadas to start building his own studio. The combined pressure of building the studio and directing films started telling on his health and in 1955 he suffered from a bout of sciatica. Though he recovered sufficiently, his decision to return immediately to his duties, against the doctor's advice, resulted in prolonged treatment and diet restrictions till the end.

But L.V.Prasad had more goals to achieve. In 1955 he assigned D.Yoganand to direct his first production 'Ilavelpu' in Telugu under the banner Lakshmi Productions. L.V.Prasad established Prasad Productions soon after this in 1956. His second son Ramesh returned from the US after obtaining his B.E.M.S degree and established Prasad Film Labs in Chennai in 1974. Prasad Productions made many memorable box office hits including Milan, Khilona, Sasural and Ek Duije Ke Liye. L.V.Prasad contributed generously towards the establishment of L.V.Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad, which is



today, one the foremost eye research institutes in the world. The efforts started by him in 1956 is today one of the largest infrastructure for feature film post production in India with facilities and offices in India, Singapore, Dubai and Hollywood.



During his lifetime L.V.Prasad held many posts and won many awards. In 1982 came the crowning glory of his lifetime – the Dada Saheb Phalke award from the Government of India, the highest recognition in Filmdom in India.

