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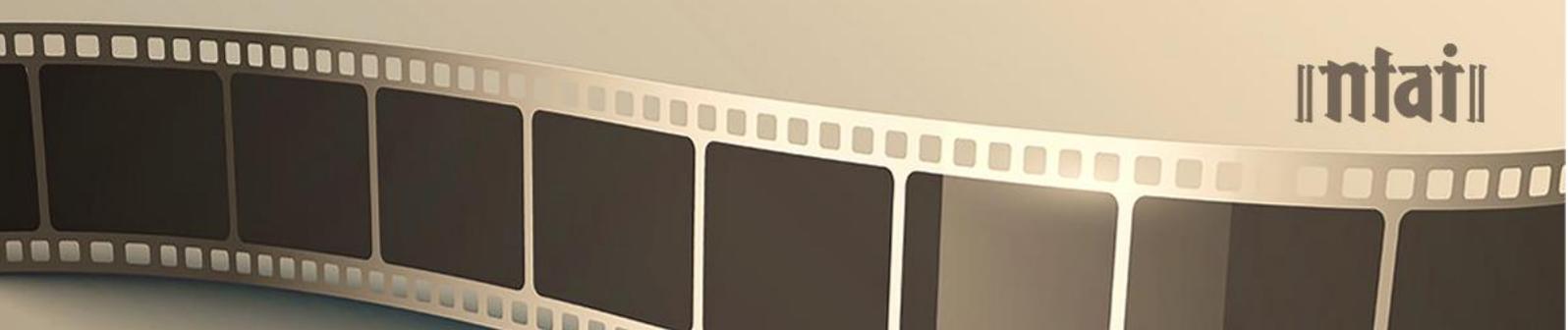
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Interview of Veteran Actor Venkataraman Gopalakrishnan in Tamil Cinema by Randor Guy

RG : This is Randor Guy interviewing Mr. V. Gopalakrishnan. Mr. V. Gopalakrishnan is popularly known as Gopi. He is an honours graduate of the Madras University and he is one of the senior most movie actors of South India. He has been in films for 45 years, almost from 1943, and he has appeared in a number of Tamil Films, including some very memorable one like Gemini's 'Miss Malini'. He started as a child artist, graduated to hero in Tamil films, and today he is one of the most popular character actors of Tamil Cinema and you see him in almost every other film released in Tamil today. This interview, the first one, takes place on the afternoon of Monday, January 11th, 1988 at Gopi's residence at T. Nagar, Madras. Gopi as we all call him, speaks in English and also in Tamil.

RG : Hi Gopi, it's nice of you to have agreed to my request to talk to me on tape for this National Film Archive of India, Oral Film History project, which as I told you earlier goes about collecting material from original sources of film history and I have been doing a good deal of work so far as South Indian Cinema is concerned. I have done similar interviews on tape which serves as the source material for research with veterans like, Late Mr. M. K. Radha, Mr. A. T. Krishnaswamy, Mr. R. M. Krishnaswamy, S. V. Sahasranamam, S. V. Venkatraman - the music director, Veppathur Kittu, S. D. Subbulakshmi and so many others who are all in my net and now I have come to you. It is indeed very nice of you to agree to all this kind of interviewing, in spite of your busy work as an actor. So, let's start off with this. Can you tell me something about, you can talk either in Tamil or in English, as it suits you and is suitable to what you want to say, can you tell us something about your early background, where are you from, where did you study and how did you come into movies, we will start from that point.

VG : First of all Randor, I must thank you for including me in the list and I am very happy to do it, let alone being busy and things like that. My father was a station master,



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railway station master and his very close friends were S. G. Kittappa and K. B. Sundarambal.

RG: Famous Tamil stars. Stage Artists.

VG: Stage Artists.

RG: Was your father on stage?

VG: No, he was only a station master, but very close to these two. And the night I was born, what 56 years ago, the artyakappa was given to me by K. B. Sundrambal.

RG: What's that, the artyakappa?

VG: That is, the father's sister is supposed to give some present to the...

RG: ...child who is born.

VG: Yeah, brother's son.

RG: So, K. B. Sundarambal was something like an aunt to you.

VG: Yeah aunt to me, and she had that, she used to call me Gopu and was very fond of me and things like that. Though my father, my mother or their ancestors have nothing to do with films. Funnily enough, we are 5 you know, 3 sisters 2 brothers, all of us have been gifted with some kind of artistic approach. My eldest sister Dhanam was a very good singer.

RG: D. R. Dhanam.

VG: D. R. Dhanam. She was a kind of contemporary to M. S. Subbulakshmi, D. K. Pattammal, N. C. Vasanthakokilam and Dhanam. She was the first playback singer in Tamil films.

RG: Which film was that?

VG: That was a film with Aswathamma in the lead. I...

RG: 'Chintamani'?

VG: I don't know if it was 'Chintamani'...

RG : 'Sakku Bai'.

VG : 'Sakku Bai' was the film where my sister sang a song. That was the first time a playback was recorded in Tamil film history. She sang for somebody else, because Aswathamma herself could sing, so she sang for somebody else in the film. And then my second sister Yogam was a very accomplished dancer.

RG : Bharatanatyam dancer.

VG : Also, everything, and she was with Uday Shankar, and she was acting in 'Kalpana' with this famous Lalitha & Padmini.

RG : Uday Shankar's 'Kalpana', made in Gemini?

VG : 'Kalpana', made in Gemini by Ramnoth. Ramnoth was the cinematographer. And she has toured abroad with Uday Shankar, gone to a lot of countries where Ravi Shankar used to accompany them as the musician. And I...since I know anything about myself I have been only doing acting. And my younger brother is an accomplished mridangist.

RG : What's his name?

VG:Rangarajan.

RG : Where is he now?

VG : He has quit mridangam. He is running a printing press, doing very well. But he even accompanied people like Madurai Mani Iyer and T. R. Mahalingam.

RG : Famous music giants.

VG : You know giants, he used to accompany them. My younger sister of course, Rajamani, was a child star in 'Gnana Soundari'. She was a young Gnana Soundari. She did 'Navajeevanam'. She did a couple of films you know.

RG : What are they doing now? Your younger brothers and sisters.

VG : Except me, everyone has quit this artistic line. They have all become housewives, and my brother is doing very well as printer. Only myself, I have stuck to this. I think, like Shakespeare says, it's not in ourselves, it's in our stars. It's written that I should

become an actor. So ever since I know anything about myself, I started acting. And by the time I was 10 or 12, 13 I got an entertainer's badge in the scout group.

RG : Where was all this?

VG : Madras. My father, he came to Madras for our education. Travelling from place to place was harming our education, so he sort of came back and settled down in Madras. And then I took to the scouting. Probably I was the first one from India to get this entertainer's bat. It's a badge which has a Red Indian head on the badge. And I got it. In school days I used to sing, I used to act, I used to perform. And I was probably the only actor I know in Tamil Nadu or in the country who was in school, acting in films, who was in college, acting in films, then continued acting without doing any other work, even thinking of doing any other work for a day. I did my Honours very successfully, but then the thought never came to me that I should do anything else. I stuck to acting, I had tough times. There were, there were, there were days you see, those days educated people were looked down upon. And very reputed actor of today was sort of you know looking suspiciously at me when I came to the studios. What's this guy doing here? And they tried really hard to not give you a role. I stuck it out, I stuck it out, and now I can say that I have you know I got the industry very well within my grasp. I even reject roles now a days. And people want me for certain particular kind of role.

RG : What was your first film? And how did that happen?

VG : My first film was Gemini's 'Harishchandra'.

RG : Was it made by Raja Rajeswari at Gemini?

VG : At Gemini.

RG : Some kind of partnership by Kannamba and others.

VG : That's right. At Gemini Studios. Directed by Nagabhushanam.

RG : That was her husband.

VG : That was her husband. With P. U. Chinnappa and Kannamba in the lead. There was this Logidasan who was played by one Sethuraman who's a famous singer now, and this Logidasan had half a dozen friends and one of the friends was myself. And this Loose Mohan, he also entered films in that film.

RG : As one of the boys?

VG: As one of the boys. And this Venkatraman who is now in Nadigar Sangam, we were altogether. I was in school. Opposite the school there was a typewriting institute.

RG: In Mylapore.

VG: In Mylapore. And a man there, one day just asked me. You look very nice. Why don't you do a role in film.

RG: Who was that man. Do you remember him?

VG: Mr Ramanathan, who actually then worked for Mehboob and he was even in charge of dubbing Aan in England and all that. Infact, I was suggested for dubbing Dilip Kumar's voice. I was supposed to go to London. But then something else happened and they got a local voice. That Ramanathan was responsible for me entering film industry. Little later a chance meeting with Dhanu.

RG: Cartoonist.

VG: Cartoonist. The famous cartoonist Dhanu. He and I were very great friends, after that of course. He met me one day again in Mylapore and he took me to Gemini studios. I was then imitating the popular heroes of those days, popular artists of those days like T. S. Balaiah, N. S. Krishnan. So I was introduced to Mr. S. S. Vasam and creative people at Gemini like K. J. Mahadevan, Kothamangalam Subbu, Veppathur Kittu. They all used to ask me to perform like Chinnappa, Balaiah.

RG: Imitations of those actors.

VG: I used to be such a good mimic and Mr. S. S. Vasam said, send that boy immediately to my room. And then there was 'Miss Malini' which was made there.

RG: 1944-45

VG: 1945-46

RG: This is after 'Harishchandra'?

VG: After 'Harishchandra'. A year or two later. And there was a great script by R. K. Narayan which was made into a film called 'Miss Malini' with Kothamangalam Subbu playing Mr. Sampath. Ramnoth produced it and Subbu directed it. With Pushpavalli,

her sister and Gemini Ganeshan was in a small role in that film. Javar Seetharaman, probably it was Jawar Sitaraman's first film.

RG: Quite likely.

VG: And they offered me a permanent job in...

RG: Gemini Studios.

VG: Asked me to join. There were days when they had people like M. K. Radha, people like Ranjan, people like Sundari Bai. Even now the present Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Janaki Ramachandran, was on the payroll of Gemini Studios and hundreds of others. But then it was Mr. Ramnoth who said don't discontinue your studies. Continue studying. Anybody can become an actor. But not all can get degrees.

RG: This is what Ramnoth said.

VG: Ramnoth said he himself being MA. MA not BA, those days. Gopi you are studying well, you are a good actor I agree, but continue your education. So, I finished 'Miss Malini'. At the same time 'Mahatma Udhagar', which was done in 1946-47.

RG: What is this 'Mahatma Udhagar', Kothamangalam Seenu did it?

VG: Seenu was the senior Udhagar and I was the young Udhagar, which was directed by....

RG: Pattu Iyer.

VG: Pattu Iyer, once an actor who became a director later on. And he has his younger brother in films a long time ago, Radhakrishnan. He was an assistant director.

RG: He is still there.

VG: He is still there. And Mr. Pattu Iyer directed this. Mr. TP Sundaram, I can't forget him. He produced this movie. And we did most of the work in Bombay.

RG: Who was this T. P. Sundaram? Is he still around?

VG: He is still around. After Udhagar he did one film I can think of, Alibaba and 40 thieves with M. G. R. and Vyjayanthimala.

RG : 'Baghdad Thirudan'.

VG : 'Baghdad Thirudan' was produced by T. P. Sundaram.

RG : M. G. R. and Vaijyanthimala.

VG : And recently he also started film with Goundamani. He did a couple of schedules.

RG : Is he still active? Is he still around?

VG : Yes he is active. In fact, once Mr. T. P. Sundaram, the heroin of that film was Vijayalakshmi. And I, we are all going in car.

RG : In Mahatma Udhangar?

VG : In Bombay evening around 6 30. We were going to see a film called 'Jhumke'.

RG : 'Chupke'

VG : No 'Jhumke'. Jhumke is earrings. And our car overturned. We skidded. And The car went few rounds. You know. And landed on its top. And on side of the road. But funnily nothing happened to any of us in the car. I even remember the driver of the car who used to be a taxi driver in Woodlands Hotel, Madras, Mailakpore. A man called Narsimha I think. Then we went to see 'Jhumke'. We saw the film, we had dinner that night and we came back.

RG : In spite of the smashed car, like in movies.

VG : Yeah. So that was how 'Mahatma Udhangar' and 'Miss Malini' were done. 'Miss Malini' was a superhit.

RG : Can you tell me something about the making of 'Miss Malini', how it came about. And what exactly did Ramnoth do? As you said he was the producer of the film. And what was Ramnath at that time in Gemini? He was the controller of the production.

VG : No, no, no. Ramnoth was just a cameraman. Like there were many cameramen there like Kamal Ghosh, Tambu, Aleppa. Ramnoth was just a senior cameraman and Shekhar was art director who originally started as a sound engineer.

RG : Yeah I know

VG : Ramnoth and Shekhar used to work together in all those great pictures. They made some lovely pictures. B. N. Reddy, Ramnoth, Shekhar. See this Mr. Ramnoth had an idea to make some small budget movies. In fact, I have seen Mr. Vasanth walking sort of kind of tense, nervous. When Ramnoth used to be sitting and telling his views on how pictures should be made. And at that time Mr. Vasanth was making this 'Chandralekha'

RG : Great 'Chandralekha'.

VG : Which was you know I think at least about 30 lakh production, those days, 40 years back. Which I think escalation wise should be now in crores. And Mr. Ramnoth was saying, you make pictures like 'Miss Malini', Kannama ana kalili, pictures like that the entire cost of production both 'Miss Malini' and 'Kannama and Kalini' was just 1 lac.

RG : Just 1 lac for both the films?

VG : No 1 lac for each film up to the first print. So, he said, spend 3 lacs on a picture and make 10 pictures in a year. And you have let's say 5 pictures succeed and 5 pictures just make 0, fail. You still have ten units with one picture experience. That is an asset to the studio. Whereas now you are making 'Chandralekha', this picture fails, you have to close the studio. You are sinking everything. But then Mr. Vasanth you know was that kind of man who never thought of failure, but he clicked anyway. A big way and he took south to the north for the first time. Showed north what advertising was, what could be done with advertising. And then followed Nagareddy or AVM and others.

RG : What was the role you played in Miss Malini and others?

VG : In 'Miss Malini', Mr Sampath as an office boy. Kind of a jaunty imp. You know and he is actually introduced sleeping.

RG : I remember wife being bored and all.

VG : Yeah Mr. Sampath will come and say (Tamil dialog) and then he will say go to coffee shop and get some coffee.

RG : And who wrote the dialog?

VG : Subbu. Subbu did the entire script and the songs were satirical. And it was such a big hit. I was so happy to have been associated with it. And I had the great fortune of

meeting people like Mr. Ramnoth, people like Shekhar, people like Subbu and last but not the least, Mr. R. K. Narayan himself.

RG : You met him at that time?

VG : Oh yes. He used to be there with us on the sets. And then I eventually met him later on quite a few times. He came to Jupiter to sell one of his stories.

RG : I see, when was this?

VG : A little later than '47. August '47. 15th August '47, Ramnath and Shekhar left Gemini studios, they accepted an offer from Jupiter. They made this 'Kanniyin Kathali' which was an adaptation of The Twelfth night. One of the later projects was R. K. Narayan's.

RG : Was it something called the scientist?

VG : Could be. But R. K. Narayan had some funny deal with Jupiter people. He was running around to get his money. And he was telling us he how he had to move around from place to place.

RG : Why I am asking you this, A. S. A. Sami who spoke to me on one of these similar interviews told me, that there was a very big project of Jupiter's called The Scientist.

VG : With R. K. Narayan Script?

RG : I think it was R. K. Narayan Script.

VG : Could be.

RG : Which they wanted to make it in three languages that is in Tamil, Hindi and also in English, sounds very ambitious. And Harindranath Chattopadhyay, famous quiet writer and also actor was paid 50,000 rupees in advance paid by Jupiter, to play the role of the scientist in Hindi and English. For which purpose he is supposed to have stayed in Madras, doing nothing nearly for a year. And then finally it was abandoned. And C. N. Annadurai was supposed to have played the scientist in Tamil version. Is it the same script?

VG : I don't know. It could be. I only know that Mr Narayan used to come to Coimbatore, stay with Ramnoth and I don't think any of his stories got started.

RG: Nothing happened on this project. And going back to Ms Malini Gopi, what exactly was the role that Ramnoth played in that? He was the producer you said?

VG: Yeah in the sense American Style

RG: Executive producer.

VG: He was real producer. He got what he wanted. He got Subbu to do what he wanted. Subbu was technically called the director. But it was Ramnoth who did everything.

RG: Was Ramnath on sets?

VG: Everyday. Every shot. Even the shots were fixed by Ramnoth. And he used to operate on the camera.

RG: He used to operate on the camera?

VG: Yes yes. He used to sit on the camera and do the shot. I mean the entire success of 'Miss Malini', I will trace it to Mr. Ramnoth.

RG: Though Subbu's name...

VG: Subbu. Yes, he played a main role and the script was his and all that. The real pruning of it, the editing you know what goes into film all that was Ramnoth.

RG: He was something like David O Selznick.

VG: Absolutely. Even 'Kannama and Kadilini' originally. The same style did it. It was such a big success.

RG: Did you act in 'Kannama and Kadilini'?

VG: No, it was just before 'Miss Malini'. And I knew that it was Rs 90000 actually, the cost of the picture. And I was also now in another picture in Rohini studios, (Tamil Title - indecipherable)

RG: Where was this Rohini Studios at that time?

VG: Mr. H. M. Reddy, one of the real veterans of the film industry, he owned this Golden Studios.

RG : Or later became golden studios.

VG : Later became Golden Studios. He used to call it Rohini Studios.

RG : That was his banner.

VG : And he did a picture called 'Vanjam' in which I worked as an assistant director.

RG : You took some interest in assistant director.

VG : Because I could not get acting work.

RG : So, you switched onto this.

VG : So, I had to work and I worked as an associate director. Then Javar Seetharaman wrote the script for 'Vanjam'. It actually introduced Kantha Rao and Rajnala into films. The first film they ever did. And I dubbed for Kantharao in Tamil version.

RG : It was made in Tamil.

VG : It was shot twice, language wise. So, I had to only, lipmovement wise, I had to mouth the words, that's all. And Savitri was the heroine. And there they made a film called 'Panam Paduthum Padu' with N. T. Rama Rao, Jamuna, Serukalathur Sama and the others.

RG : How well did you know Serukalathur Sama, one of the great character actors?

VG : Not very well. I am sorry to say this, but actually he came to my house asking for work in his hay day.

RG : How did that happen?

VG : I don't know. Probably he knew that I was working with H. M. Reddy and he came to my house one day. I have of course seen him work, heard him sing and I told H. M. Reddy. And H. M. Reddy used to treat me like a son and I used to get very angry, I used to sort of blow my top, wont sit in a corner, (Tamil dialog). All that he will say, you know paternally. What films are you making sir, not the way to make a film, I will say you know. And I used to get paid few hundreds a month. But then my temper was this. And he knew that my thing was sincere. So, I told him this guy you must give him a role. What role. I said some role. There was this aristocrat, who was a lover of dogs in that film.

RG: In 'Vanjam' or 'Panam Paduthum Padu'?

VG: 'Panam Paduthum Padu'. 'Vanjam' was a costume film and this Serukalathur Sama did not like dogs. And he used to say (Tamil - Swanam - Pawan) that even to touch a dog, he used to consider as a sin. And the man was always surrounded by 20-30 dogs and he had a hell. But then it gave him some work. He was a meticulous man, he was. The cleanest guy one can meet in your life. In fact, all his personal things were clean. You know he used to show me things which he had bought 30 years ago, 35 years ago. Like even a pen knife, a radio, or anything you liked that used to be like he bought it yesterday. That kind of a man he was. And of course, he is no more and, I saw him recently in 'Mira', it was telecasted.

RG: He died in a rickshaw of heart failure.

VG: What a pity. He was a great singer, great actor those days. And when he was acting in 'Marmayogi' also I had met him.

RG: Late 1940s.

VG: Yes yes, '47-'48. After Ramnoth left 'Kanniyin Kathali' was first, then Marmayogi came. So he was acting a role there.

RG: After 'Miss Malini' what did you do?

VG: After 'Miss Malini'...

RG: 'Chandralekha'.

VG: No no, Chandralekha was same time.

RG: Started earlier but released afterwards. It was released in '48 April.

VG: But then 'Miss Malini' was released earlier. In fact, I did a small role in Chandralekha.

RG: I remember seeing you.

VG: I was something like, you know a page boy, to M. K. Radha and Mr. Vasana was insistent that I was in the film. In fact, you even hear Mr. Vasana's voice in the circus. In microphone the speaker you hear his voice.

RG: He introduces us to Chandralekha.

VG: That's right. That was Mr. Vasan. Oh he was a great man.

RG: And one question I have you were being there when 'Chandralekha' was made.

VG: Yes

RG: Can you tell me something about the making of 'Chandralekha', because it's something that fascinates me all the time. I have written about it extensively.

VG: This film was Mr. Vasan's dream and there has never been a day when more than two shots were taken, during Chandralekha's shooting. Somewhere about 11-11 30, they will light up a shot and then they used to ring up Mr. Vasan, say that shot was ready. And Mr. Vasan will come, drive down from his Edward Lane house to Gemini Studios in his car no 2484. I even remember the car no.

RG: And he even had an old (indecipherable)

VG: And he used to come in his famous colour shirt.

RG: 3/4th sleeves.

VG: 3/4th sleeves, towel, coloured dhoti. And come into his set. He will watch what's happening. Then if he doesn't like it, he will say relight it, this is how I want it. And then they break for lunch. And this Mr. M. K. Radha, the great man.

RG: Was the Hero

VG: Was the hero of the film. Was probably a monthly paid artist.

RG: Yeah he was

VG: And like a government servant, he used to draw his salary. Was the most respected man there. But funnily enough M. K. Radha never sat whenever Mr. Vasan was in the studio. Never sat. There was a chair with his name you know M. K. Radha. The man never sat. Vasan used to tell him come on Radha sit down, don't do this. That respect he had for Mutalāḷi.

RG: Boss

VG: Something unbelievable. And I have never seen such a senior artist do like this.

RG: I have one or two points which I gathered when I did the long article which came in Cinema Indian (Indecipherable). See 'Chandralekha' was obviously in Vasan's mind even as early as 1943. In one of the song books in (Indecipherable Tamil Title), there is an announcement of 'Chandralekha' and also 'Avvaiyar'. 'Avvaiyar' came out almost a decade later. And in 'Chandralekha', the heroine was not according to that advertisement Rajakumari but K. L. V. Vasantha. K. L. V. Vasantha as Chandralekha. Later on she left and joined T. R. Sundaram. Another point which Veppattur Kittu told me. I don't know whether you know about it. Whether you can confirm it if it's in your knowledge. Originally to play the role of the hero, Veerasimhan, that was his name. It was not M. K. Radha who was thought of. But some lawyer from (Indecipherable for a Non-Tamilian), he looked very handsome. Somebody called Rajagopalam. He was tested and fixed. And M. K. Radha was supposed to do the role of Sasankan, the role of villain. Because Mr. Vasan thought he was quite right when you see the film, the scope for acting was more for Sasankan than for Veerasimhan, A passive character. This man very particular about his image, was not keen. He did not have the guts or the minds to tell his boss and he sent his wife, I believe, only to go and see him. And then he said if he thinks so he could have told me. Then they started thinking of some substitute and in the beginning, it was K. J. Mahadevan who was thought for Sasankan. And I believe a scene was shot with K. J. Mahadevan as Sasankan.

VG: Yeah he had done, (Indecipherable), he was a hero.

RG: K. J. was a soft sophisticated looking man and he did not look like a villain at all.

VG: And very short too.

RG: Yeah and very short. And that was why Ranjan was thought of and Ranjan at that time was doing something called 'Salivahanan'.

VG: Yes 'Salivahanan'.

(Possibly missing audio or recording stopped momentarily)

VG: I don't know about this Rajgopala being fixed for 'Chandralekha' and all that. I only know as the shooting was going on, I used to be there most of the times. And Mr. Vasan had a very soft corner for Mr. Ranjan, the late actor and who used to do all stunts himself and take all risks and he was real good.

RG : You know all this talk of what we saw in Ranjan, real kind of macho thing he was according to the age, that period. As a matter of fact, Vasana thought, this is what Veppathur Kittu told me. I am also doing something (interview) like with him. Vasana had a very real feeling that Ranjan looked slightly effeminate.

VG : Quiet right.

[30 mins]

RG : Which he did. And that kind of role he did in 'Mangamma Sapatham' also, he did look effeminate on the screen. So, he was telling, (tamil dialog), can be moulded, especially somebody like you. And Kittu tells me that, Vasana gave Ranjan real help to mould him.

VG : Yes yes. I remember a shot where Ranjan speaks a dialog to Sant Somu in the film. (Tamil dialogue), that was the dialog, Ranjan had to say to Somu.

RG : Then he loses Chandrlekha.

VG : And this was dubbed 54 times. I was there and Mr. Vasana was never happy with what Ranjan did. He says you know I want that 9th take, but 11th take was not like that you know.

RG : That dub?

VG : No that particular dialog. Those days there was no dubbing. But this particular dialog, Mr. Vasana was not happy, so he wanted to have it dubbed. And one of the greatest recordist ever was, Mr Biggs? He was the one there.

RG : This dialog of Ranjan, that particular line which was dubbed 54 times, we were talking about that. Talking of 'Chandrlekha' because its making was stretched for almost 5 years as I understand. Number of cameramen had worked on it. Ramnoth, Kamal Ghosh and so many others. When you were around who was the person who was doing the camera?

VG : Actually, Kamal Ghosh was the cameraman for 'Chnadrlekha'. But then there were scenes where when Mr. Vasana requested Mr Ramnoth to come in and help. In fact, the drum dance, quite a bit of it was shot by Mr. Ramnath. And even Alappa and...

RG : All of them....

VG : All of them used to help him. Sometimes you know two studios, two sets, different things. But then Mr Vasan always saw the rushes of previous day's work before going to shoot the next day.

RG : Like in Hollywood. And they used to get it ready so fast

VG : 24 hours. I mean if you finished work this evening, tomorrow evening by 6'o clock, you see the rushes and then go into the set. In fact, even Mr. SivajiGaneshan had helped Mr. Vasan. They used to have this Hindi shot over the (indecipherable), what do you call it, the viewfinder. And not happy, they used to ask SivajiGaneshan to walk into the projection room and see the rushes. Sivajitold me that I have never felt that nervous even in (indecipherable - Parasatti?) days. Because Mr. Vasan (Tamil dialogue), except especially when there is a scene when his wife says she was conceived again. Ashok Kumar says "Yeh kaise hua". And that used to really produce laughter in the audience. SivajiGaneshan could not at all satisfy.

RG : Talking about SivajiGaneshan, sorry to interrupt you. Kittu told me a very interesting story. It is not a story, it's a fact. I wonder whether you know about it. This is the time when 'Chandralekha' was being cast. I have written about this aspect also in writing about Vasan. How like Alfred Hitchcock and other famous directors, very competent directors could, and they do, sometimes miss spotting talent. Like for instance Alfred Hitchcock is supposed to have missed Audrey Hepburn. He said who's this semi-starved girl. Feed her nicely and bring her. And says in one of his interviews that I missed seeing that talent in that girl. And she was semi-starved you know, doing war there, no food and things like that. So, when 'Chandralekha' was being cast, SivajiGanesan was a stage artist. he has done something called (indecipherable - play title), in which he had made a splash. Kittu who knew him well and was writing for (indecipherable - Anand something), wrote a raving review of SivajiGanesan's work in that play. And because of that Shivaji, I believe, was visiting Kittu quite often. Sometimes bringing some Bananas and a few apples whatever he could afford at that time. And he was wanting to do a role, any role in 'Chandralekha'. And there was one role which I am sure he remembers, that of the assistant or AD or whatever you call it, of M. K. Radha. Which was subsequently played by Javar Seetharaman. That small role which he was angling for. And Kittu took SivajiGanesan to Mr. Vasan and introduced him. And they surprisingly to the shock of both SivajiGanesan and Kittu, Vasan frankly told him that he was unsuitable for films. Understatement of the century or whatever you call it. And you also said my dear friend acting on the stage is different, acting in cinema is different. You have a squint in your eye, this is exactly the defect he pointed out. Some say he did have at that time maybe later with all those

puffed up cheeks anyway. And with the squint eye nobody can even think of a close up in cinema.

VG : He had some problem with his teeth also.

RG : (Tamil dialogue). Sivajifelt totally shocked and he went away. And then Kittu was sent for (Tamil dialogue). Because they could not find anybody. Finally, and this man because of this incident I believe later on Vasana realised that we had really stepped into it, that he missed that man. Later on when Sivajibecame a big, very big star. One of the legends of Indian cinema, he always used to feel very much embarrassed in his presence and Kittu says very emphatically that was one of the reasons why Vasana did not go ahead with this (indecipherable Tamil Title - Mira Pandya...) which was you know originally a Gemini project. And later on it was taken over and given to Pantu. And even when another thing talking of this particular film you spoke to me, this 'Motor Sundaram Pillai'. This as you know was based on a true incident that took place in America.

VG : Yes yes. Clifton Web played.....

RG : I think it's called Remarkable Mr. Guinea Pig or something like that was the play (Actual Title - 'The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker'). This play itself It was story of a truck driver. this appeared as one of those human-interest bits in Time Magazine which led, or which provoked the playwright to the play. A man died driving from one town to another in a truck. He met with an accident and he died. There was some \$50,000 or something like that on his insurance claim. And two women from two towns claimed to be his wives, which you know is not possible in a Christian country. So the whole thing came up and both were married in church. The man succeeded in. They have bans and things like that but got away with all that. This was a big sensation and based on that the play was written. Clifton Web who played that role. Kittu was inspired to do this 'Motor Sundaram Pillai' Based on the same thing, he made a few changes. And then this story was suggested to Vasana. Vasana said I think SivajiGanesan is the ideal man to play this role. Then Kittu went to see SivajiGanesan and SivajiGanesan I believe said (Tamil Dialogue). And he tried his best and he came and reported back to Vasana, Sir SivajiGanesan is not interested he thinks that he is too young on screen to play a role like this and things like that. He said ok having done all the work why don't you do it in Hindi? And it was the Hindi version that came out first. And Ashok Kumar did a glorious role which was a very big hit. And Vasana was in Bombay for the celebration of some particular day of success for this film and that time SivajiGanesan was in the same hotel. He had come for some Hindi version of his own film (Tamil title). And at that time, they met in the dining hall. And Sivaji asked can I come along with you to see this film. And with old man, he used to call him, old man.

Vasan was known as old man in some circles. You come along and he said (Tamil dialogue). So he went somehow and then he saw the performance of Ashok Kumar and the film. He was so stunned. I believe during the intermission he told Kittu, if you are doing in Tamil, I will do it now. I take it as a challenge. He said that's how Vasan came about.

VG: Could be. I mean absolutely credible.

RG: I know this is what he said. Now going back to 'Chandralekha'. As you said present Chief Minister of Madras, Janaki Ramachandran.

VG: She was in the cast.

RG: She played that gypsy girl.

VG: Yeah one of the main girls in the film.

RG: (Tamil dialogue)

VG: That's right at that time I was doing 'Miss Malini' and 'Chandralekha' and all that.

RG: They were all being shot simultaneously

VG: Simultaneously so I used to see her there very often. And in fact one of my pet hobbies was making these women sit around. Lalita, Padmini, Usha, Kiran, Lakshmi.

RG: They were doing 'Kalpana' I suppose.

VG: They were doing 'Kalpana' these people and I was doing 'Miss Malini'. See 'Miss Malini' used to be shot, let's say from 9 to 6 and then 6 to 2 was 'Kalpana' or other way about. So I used to make them sit around. I used to be in half shorts at 14,15 and even then, I used to see a lot of films (Tamil Dialogue). About 'Chandralekha' it was a very painstaking effort I mean nothing was left to chance. No cost was thought of and everything was done to perfection. And a lot of time was wasted. So much time was wasted but then he wanted the best according to him. And he came out with a big real hit.

RG: Kittu tells me that the total negative, Picture negative used by Chandralekha was 600,000 feet which is something you can't even imagine.

VG : For about 16,000 feet or 15000 feet, there was never one take. Never, it was all retake retake, retake, retake. And after seeing the rushes also they will shoot the same scene again something went wrong, or they didn't like it. The way it was done. So, it used to be done so well.

RG : There is one other question which I want to ask. I have been asking a lot of people with Gemini. Fairly interesting and somewhat controversial also. There is a certain opinion based on what is supposed to be fact that M. G. Ramachandran, M. G. R did a bit role in Chandralekha. I will give you the background for this. This is fact because I checked on that when I did article on 'Chandralekha'. 'Chandralekha' was screened somewhere in Kerala near (indecipherable -Nagapore) - Trivandrum belt, close to Tamil Nadu. And in the poster M. G. Ramachandran's name was announced as part of the cast. M. G. Ramachandran, M. K. Radha, T. R. Rajakumari, Ranjan, Gemini Chandralekha. And people did not find him in the picture. So, there was a big hullabaloo. They broke glass panes, tore off the posters, set fire to steel and other things. And police had to be called. And this came in the press, that press report I saw. So, I went around asking lot of people. But nobody was very sure, and I asked A. K. Shekhar whether he was in it. He said at that time M. G. R., this was before he acted in 'Rajyakumari', which was his first film as hero in '47 in Jupiter, he was coming quite often to Gemini. And V. N. Janaki, I believe their friendship started around that time. She used to ask Shekhar as well as Ramnoth to give her boyfriend, M. G. Ramachandran a role. But he said I cannot tell you at this distance of time whether he was in the film or not. And then I asked a few others the story gets a little more intriguing. That's why I am asking you. When M. G. R. was obviously told about this demonstration in that Kerala town on this picture over his name and things like that. He did (Tamil Film Title) at Gemini 200th film or 100th film something like that which S. S. Balan, Vasan's son, directed. And that was the time when 'Chandralekha' was re-edited. Its length was reduced, quite a few songs were removed and to suit the present length. It was reduced some 15,000 and originally it was 19.000. And M. G. R. insisted that particular bit also had to go and I believe Balan was blackmailed. You are the man who can tell us the truth. Balan doesn't want to talk about it, I tried my best. Do you know anything about it?

VG : I don't think there is much credence to this story at all. I don't think this Janaki Ramachandran thing all that is all you know a fabrication. I personally think that Janaki Ramachandran and Ramachandran work together in film called 'Raja Mukthi'.

(Audio breaks)

RG : Talking about M. G. R.

VG : Yeah 'Raja Mukthi' film was shot in Pune. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar. There M. G. R. was there, Janaki Ramachandran was there. My sister did a role in that film, my younger sister, Rajamani. I am not sure that film was directed by ...

RG : Raja Chandrashekhar, that was the director.

VG : I think it was then the whole thing started. So not during 'Chandralekha' time. I have not seen M. G. R. in Gemini Studios at all.

RG : Sure about it?

VG : I am sure about it. And I don't think there was a scene shot of him and it was removed and it was put in the paper.

RG : You know why this story gets a little bit of a credence again. Why am I able to talk to you at length because I did a lot of research on this, but it was not very conclusive. Like for instance in 'Chandralekha', T. A. Jayalakshmi at that time a popular heroine, later became Mrs. Vasu Menon, became a big producer, studio owner and all that. She did a bit role. She appears in just one short sequence when Sundari Bai who comes dressed as a kind of a gypsy offering to cure Rajakumari of the fits which are all fake. She comes carrying a message about the drum dance and Ranjan sends this Sogusu, as she is called in that role and the girl who accompanies Sundari Bai down the corridors of the palace and brings her to Rajakumari's room is T. A. Jayalakshmi. And today the shot has been removed and I saw it again a couple of years ago, that shot is not there. And T. A. Jaylakshmi once told me, she is a very good friend of ours, she once told me, that was the time when she was doing the heroine's role in 'Naam Iruvar', A. V. Meiyappam. And A. V. M. made a particular request to remove that shot of Jayalakshmi in 'Chandralekha' because she was being introduced as a heroine and Vasan politely said no. This she herself said, all these things make very intriguing and interesting.

VG : I tell you this it might have been possible. But all I can say is I have no knowledge. And my guess is that Mr. M. G. R. has nothing to do with 'Chandralekha'. Because I should have seen him sometime somewhere.

RG : You had never seen him. Did you know him at that time?

VG : No.

RG : But you knew who M. G. R. was?

VG: Yes, but you see there were people I met every day there, like Chandrababu or you know.

RG: Was he there at that time?

VG: Who?

RG: Chandrababu.

VG: Yeah he was there, he was coming there. He was trying to get work and then he even tried to commit suicide. All that sort of thing you know I meet people, all sorts of. Gemini Ganeshan was the casting assistant. Jawar Seetharaman was there you know. Everybody who used to come there we used to meet.

RG: And coming to another point of slightly interesting controversy. There is a very strong opinion which is also borne out by Kittu, that a good part of Chandralekha was directed by T. G. Rajagopalachari or Acharya as he signed his films. What do you say about that?

VG: It's possible I subscribe to this view.

RG: For instance, the sequences you did, who directed it?

VG: Mr. Vasanth did it. He did it himself. So, whenever I was there, I saw the shooting going on Mr. Vasanth was doing it. But then Mr. Acharya was such a well-known director, he was also in the studio. All of them used to be there. You know all these people used to be there on the sets. K. Rajagopal, Sangu Subramanyam, Veppathur Kittu. Everybody used to be there. So how much he subscribed to that we don't know.

RG: Very difficult to know.

VG: Very difficult. Mr Acharya had done already (indecipherable Tamil Title - Mangasam..)

RG: Why am I asking you this Mr. Acharya, under whom Kittu was a direct assistant, was given the task of organizing the project itself as soon as they did (indecipherable Tamil Title - Mangalawasam....) and (indecipherable Tamil Title - Balaswaman) was finished. Both of them were big hits. They minted money. And several stories were written by several people in the creative department, what they used to call Gemini Canteen in a sarcastic way. And lots of people came off with similar stories. And one particular story arrived at based on the fables of Vikramaditya. A very clever woman

turns the table against a dacoit and cuts his nose. And that was suggested. Mr Vasan said that (Tamil dialogue). But one thing of the story stuck to his mind that was the name of the woman, Chandralekha.

VG : Oh I see.

RG : So that's how the name of the heroine was fixed.

VG : So the title was fixed first.

RG : And he announced it with no script and later I believe Raghavachari was given the final task. If you don't get a carrot soon, you already wasted six months, all sorts of stories are being told to me and I will go back to (indecipherable - avaya) because already (indecipherable - avaya) was (indecipherable). And Kittu tells me that the day he went to see Raghavachari in the morning. Every day he used to go and Raghavachari was bathing or performing. You know he was a very orthodox Iyengar Brahmin with is stuff and all. There was a book and Raghavachari was a voracious reader of books. There was a novel on the table, which Kittu picked up just to bide time, waiting for his master to come. And that was a book called Robert Macaire The Male Bandits (Original Title: Robert Macaire; or, The French Bandit in England) by G. W. M. Reynolds of the famous mysteries of court of London or whatever you call it. And the opening sequence was of a convoy of coaches leaving a village and this Robert Macaire stopping it, robbing the passengers and all are robbed. And there is one very sweet looking boy with a bag, very timid looking very innocent. And then this Robert Macaire threatens him. And then it turns out to be that the boy is a girl in disguise.

VG : I see.

RG : And that sequence you see that scene is there in 'Chandralekha' except that Rajakumari is not disguised as a boy, she is shown as a woman. And this sequence was narrated first to Mr. Vasan and he liked it. He said that was the first scene we wrote in 'Chandralekha'. And Mr Vasan asked who's that girl. And why should she travel in a convoy after dark. Then somebody said she is a dancing girl and so many dancing girls are (Tamil dialogue). So, let us make her into a girl who is interested in art, her father is a sculptor and he dies and all that was woven later on. Did you know anything about this and Raghvachari's contribution?

VG : Yes, yes. I believe that Mr. Acharya must have given his contribution, but then one can never fix one's finger as to who did what.

RG : You know why I am telling you all this at great length. I did an article as I told you which was called “Who made Chandralekha”. It is a question which people keep on asking me at number of places I talk to and there I discussed all this and finally the conclusion I have come to is that the hand that created ‘Chandralekha’ was Vasan’s.

VG : Absolutely.

RG : The reasoning I gave in the last paragraph was see Ramnoth, K. J. Mahadevan, A. K. Shekhar, all of them contributed to it and each claimed it was their baby. Now K. J. Mahadevan said 40% of it was done by him, he had told me himself. But I said all these directors, very eminent directors, after they left ‘Chandralekha’, did films. But nothing ever came anywhere near ‘Chandralekha’.

VG : Nobody did anything worthwhile.

RG : That's what I said. So, I said obviously the hand that shaped it all was definitely Vasan’s.

VG : Undoubtedly. Undoubtedly Vasan.

RG : After ‘Chandralekha’ what did you do?

VG : ‘Chandralekha’, ‘Miss Malini’, ‘Mahatma Udhagar’ were same time. ’46 -’47. Then I continued my education. I joined The Presidency College. In fact, I was doing intermediate in Pachaiyappa's College when I was doing ‘Miss Malini’.

RG : I see so you were a student of Pachaiyappa's College.

VG : Yeah I did my inter there. And up to 4 o'clock I used to go to college. Then 4 o'clock I used to leave studio this college come to Gemini studios. From 6 to 2 used to be my shooting. So 2 o'clock always Mr Subbu used to drop me in my house. And then again, I go to college like that.

RG : You were living in Mylapore at that time.

VG : (Some street name) Seenu and Subbu were living in the same house.

RG : Kothamangalam Seenu and Kothamangalam Subbu. Can you tell me something about Kothamangalam Subbu?

VG : Mr. Subbu was a very talented man. He was very fond of folktales you know. And used to perform lots of folktales stories sort of he used to narrate. Then finally of course you know he did (indecipherable - Villupat...). Very very talented man. And he gave life to that character RK Narayan's Mr Sampath.

RG : Yeah he did very well.

VG : He fitted it like a glove you know.

RG : Hypnotis.

VG : Beautifully done. I mean the age difference was so much that I was not anywhere near them in the sense I was probably 14-15 and they were all in the middle ages. And in fact as I told you he used to get off at Sundari Bai's house at night and then tell me not to tell his house people that he got off there and you know I used to think what's happening. What is this all that kind of. Anyway after 'Miss Malini'.....

RG : Were you that innocent at that time?

VG : I was in fact.

RG : You were?

VG : Yes, yes. Even in a hot house like this, one had his own.

RG : Later on he married Sundari Bai.

VG : Yes

RG : As the second wife.

VG : And then I joined Presidency College did my honours. When Mr Ramnoth again was doing this 'Ezhai Padum Padu'.

RG : At the time Ramnath had left Gemini.

VG : Yes, he left in '47. He did 'Kanniyin Kathali' and 'Marmayogi'. In fact, he did little finalization of 'Velaikari'.

RG : I believe some of the shots of 'Velaikari' he was taken by him in Gemini.

VG: He was there at that time. and then he did some more movies Then Naidu, Shri Ram Naidu from Pakshiraja got him to direct this 'Ezhai Padum Padu' which was this Tamil translation of Victor Hugo's Les Miserables. And Narayan company in Madras and Pakshiraja Studios in Coimbatore, they did it in partnership.

RG: Where was this shot?

VG: Coimbatore. In Pakshiraja Studios.

RG: In Pakshiraja Studios. That is the old Pioneer Studio.

VG: Was it called Pioneer Studio before that?

RG: That is the old Pioneer studio. I recently went to see.

VG: I didn't know that.

RG: It is now as silent as a graveyard

VG: I knew it only as a Pakshiraja Studios owned by Mr. Naidu.

RG: I saw both the studios, Central Studios.

VG: Central Studio was the busiest studio I have seen when with 4 or 5 floors, with 4 or 5 pictures at the same time. 'Krishna Leela' at one side, 'Kanniyin Kathali' one side, 'Rani' one side you know. Very sorry that these studios had to, even Modern Theatres, studios like that had to close.

RG: Let's go back to 'Ezhai Padum Padu'.

VG: 'Ezhai Padum Padu' was made in Coimbatore.

RG: What year was that?

VG: It was shot in the year 1950.

RG: How long did it take?

VG: Or 1949

RG: 1949 I think

VG: '48 - '49

RG: And you played the hero in it.

VG: That was called Umakandhan in Tamil Film, which was Marius in the English version. And that was the first Tamil Picture where this Lalita and Padmini did acting roles.

RG: Earlier they were only dancing in pictures.

VG: They were dancing probably in few hundred films before that. They were not in Tamil films without their dancing. And I was the first hero to Lalita and Padmini in 'Ezhai Padum Padu'.

RG: You fall in love with both.

VG: No, it is Lalita who is in love with me but then I am in love with Padmini.

RG: Some kind of love triangle was there. Was it a true adaptation of Victor Hugo's classic?

VG: Totally absolutely cent percent. And the only change they made was it was the French Revolution in third part there, and we had it as the national Congress fight against the British Independence Movement. Everything else was very true to the book except that Mr. Shri Ram Naidu put in one a dance item done by a few foreign girls. There were about some 40-50 girls added in Coimbatore I don't know somehow.

RG: Where did you pick them up?

VG: I don't know they all came to the studio and they were all dressed up and he shot a dance with them in a boat or in funny locations and he introduced that in the film. That is because you know they like to have items in the film you know. One item which is like...

RG: Who wrote 'Ezhai Padum Padu'? Like dialogues, script and all the things.

VG: You know, funny thing, I can't remember. I really can't remember. It was released in 1950 Deepawali here in Casino Theatre. First Tamil picture to be released here in Casino. But then there was a Tamil picture released before that, it was called 'Neelakulam' which was

RG : The Blue Lagoon.

VG : Dubbed version of Jean Simmons'..

RG : Arthur Rank Production

VG :Blue Lagoon, dubbed in England.

RG : We were talking about the making of 'Ezhai Padum Padu'. I asked whether you remember the man who wrote it, you said you was not able to recall the name.

VG : Except I remember Mr. S. M. Subbaiah Naidu was the music director. And N. Prakash

RG : B. N. Prakash

VG : He was hard of hearing.

RG : He died recently.

VG : North Indian.

RG : North Indian. He made films also.

VG : He was a cameraman and of course Mr. Balaiah, Mr. T. S. Durairaj, they were all in the cast. Javar Seetharaman

RG : Who played Jean Vali jean?

VG : Javar Seetharaman.

RG : No Seetharaman was inspector.

VG : Jean Vali jean, Nagaiah

RG : V. Nagaiah

VG : The main man was Nagaiah. A very interesting anecdote about this priest, this Christian priest whom Jean Vali jean meets when he comes, escapes.

RG : The three candlesticks.

VG : He was played by one (indecipherable - Mr. Nag... Mahadevan)

RG : He played Narad in many films and was a singer...

VG : And the whole sequence was shot. And Mr. Naidu was not happy. And he changed the entire thing. Reshot the whole thing with Mr Serukulathur Sama.

RG : Serukulathur Sama played the...

VG : Played the priest in the released version. And that film was a real success. Released on Deepawali day in 1950 about 38 years ago. And '51 March I gave me Hons. Exam. So, I said nothing doing and went back to last minute mugging and you know what and even write honours exam only once. I did not want to take any chances. But '51 March by that time 'Ezhai Padum Padu's hit had sort of you know faded away. And I was not in so much demand as when the picture was released. By '52 I started working with Mr. H. M. Reddy as assistant director. And that was my glorious time. I have some problem with my face. I used to pinch my pimples whenever I used to read. So, my friends used to guess how much I have read only by the depth of my pimples. And it became a serious problem and I had to have some ultraviolet ray exposures and that with my face and burnt my skin in hospital in Edward Lane Road. (indecipherable) Because of that I could not get roles also and I worked as H. M. Reddy's assistant. I worked in Vanjam in fact I slept in the editing room for 3 months.

[60 mins]

RG : Who was the editor at that time? Who edited this film?

VG : His cousin L. Ramachandram.

RG : B. L. Ramachandram who also directed films.

VG : He was the editor.

RG : He was H. M. Reddy's cousin.

VG : In fact, Mr. H. M. Reddy never had any children of his own. He was called Pappa Ji. And there were 75-100 people living in that house. Near Palmgrove Hotel, that was his house.

RG : Palmgrove Hotel is...

VG : Near, near that. First house on the left in that (indecipherable - Kodai...road) was his house. Got old car. There was driver called Kannan. And he used to smoke with a pipe sort of thing you know that is what you call that thing you attach the cigarette into one.

RG : Holder

VG : Holder. He used to smoke with the holder. He was so (indecipherable) bald man, a lovely moustache. And a man if you look at him. You really had respect for him. That kind of man. And Mr. Prithviraj Kapoor whenever he came to Madras, he used to live with Mr. H. M. Reddy. He used to sleep on the floor. And all the children used to stamp on him.

RG : Whose Children...?

VG : Mr. Prithviraj. He used to come to Madras, stay with H. M. Reddy and all the children used to have a lovely time. Mr. H. M. Reddy as I told you we had a kind of a parent son friend I don't know what mentor student funny relationship. And the first day he said go to Plaza theatre. And see this Vanjam and come and tell me how people like it. And it was the first time I knew that he had credited me as Associate Director V. Gopalakrishnan in Vanjam. I was only an Assistant Director. And he had thought it fit that he should give me this credit. And not of my asking he had done it on his own. This is something I will never forget. And this 75-100 people were all, this children, grandchildren, sons in law, daughters in law of B. L. Ramchandran (indecipherable) son his father you know there is the chappal (indecipherable) Madhu no cameraman.

RG : Who used to do small roles in his films?

VG : Again B. L. R.'s son.

RG : Who, Madhu is BLR's son?

VG : Yes (indecipherable....Yedaswamy, Madhu, Bangaraj....)

RG : (indecipherable...Yedaswamy) was BL's son.

VG : His son. And there used to be cooking in that house for about 75-100 people. They were all united until Pappaji was alive. They were all together, he really. Though he

was a childless man they all called him Pappaji and they were all well-knit. They lived together, ate together and everything.

RG : And who was H. P. Babu? How was he related to H. M. Reddy? He used to do films with him in early days? Supposed to be his brother-in-law or something, you have never heard of the name?

VG : I have heard of this name. Another great man who does cranes and things like that.

RG : Annaiya

VG : Annaiya is also from that family. After he died, the whole family split I remember like this AIADMK party today (Tamil Dialogue).

RG : In 'Vanjam' you did not act.

VG : I didn't act. I only dubbed for Kantha Rao. And there was a special difficulty there because this Kantha Rao used to have a little stammer.

RG : I know

VG : And without knowing this they had given his name as Pratap.

RG : I see. Not Kantha Rao.

VG : No, the hero's name in the film was Pratap and this P used to give him trouble. You know the letter P. He used to have more trouble on Amavasya, full moon day, whenever guests were on the set, he used to stammer more. I had a little tough time in dubbing him, but I was very well able to do it. It was such a soothing picture More than 100 days it ran. both in Telugu and Tamil. After that I worked with an Italian director called Alfredo Midori.

RG : Alfredo Midori.

VG : Who was Rossellini's assistant. And he had worked with Rossellini for a number of pictures and the scriptwriters were, was one Antonio Purino. They came to film temples and festivals in South India.

RG : Like a documentary film.

VG : A documentary film. It was done in Ferrania colour. They had got the film from, raw stock from Italy. I was working with them for almost a year.

RG : You were an assistant.

VG : Like an assistant. I was an assistant director. Used to carry cameras and run around with them. And '55, again my acting career started. It was started in a film called 'Naane Raja' produced and directed by one R. R. Chandran.

RG : Cameraman, director.

VG : Cameraman who became a director producer.

RG : That is some kind of a folklore.

VG : Yes this was Ramayanam in costumes, except it was not mythology, it was history. It was a king and you know Sivaji Ganesan played the version of Ravanam.

RG : Sivaji played Ravanam.

VG : Yeah and S. S. Subbaiah played Rama and Sriranjani played Sita. Sriranjani Jr. And I was Lakshmana. But then we had different names, story was the same. There was an interesting incident. It was about the fourth or fifth picture of Sivaji Ganesan after 'Parasakthi' and this film was shot at night. And Sivaji Ganesan comes and you know he wants to take away Sita from the hut and he will say (Tamil dialogue) all that. It's all written by Kannadasan. The dialogs, lyrics everything by Kannadasan. And I was Lakshmana and I was supposed to touch Sivaji Ganesan, twist him round and give my dialog and he said (Tamil dialogue). He said on the first day and (Tamil dialog).

RG : Which studio was it?

VG : Vauhini Studios. There is a photograph of mine even now. Chandrababu visiting me at 2 am in Vauhini Studios with me, myself, Rajam and Chandra. The four of us in a photograph. Then they came and secretly told me...(Tamil dialogue).

RG : He was already a big hero at that time.

VG : Yes and about probably half dozen pictures. And it started with fiction, but we became good friends later on. We did a lot of pictures together. In fact, he took me to the war front in '65 Pakistan Indo War. Where I was doing everything. Master of ceremonies. I used to act. In fact I did bannerman with him in (indecipherable). In that

play in Tamil with Gemini Ganeshan. In fact, when he came here to the congress grounds, he said the entire success was due to one man, that was Gopalakrishnan. That's what Sivaji said.

RG : And this 'Naane Raja' how was it received by the public?

VG : It flopped. Really flopped. It was very good costumes. Well done. Photography was very good. But somehow one can't explain these things, it flopped.

RG : I understand. After that what did you do? After 'Naane Raja'?

VG : And immediately these some stills of mine were seen in some of these magazines. So Modern Theatres called me.

RG : T. R. Sundaram.

VG : That's right.

RG : You did not know him earlier?

VG : No. They saw these photographs of 'Naane Raja' and they called for me. They signed me for three pictures and I did 'Paasavalai', then 'Aaravalli' and the third film was never shot.

RG : It was not produced?

VG : No, in the sense that contract was not used. Though I have acted in many many films in Modern Theatres even after Mr. Sundaram, even with his son.

RG : Ramappa.

VG : Those days I acted only in two pictures, one was 'Paasavalai'.

RG : This 'Paasavalai' was a big success, wasn't it?

VG : Superhit.

RG : And with M. K. Radha in the main role.

VG : G. Varalakshmi.

RG : G. Varalakshmi. And who wrote the script of 'Paasavalai'? Was it Veppattur Kittu?

VG : That again I am not able to answer.

RG : Why I am asking you is Veppattur Kittu tells me that after he left Gemini. After some kind of misunderstanding, he came back again. And this misunderstanding was obviously sorted. He was called by T. R. Sundaram and he did a couple of movies there. The first one was this 'Passavalai' which was a very big success. And he also told me which I don't know whether you are aware of it. This 'Passavalai' is one of the few films I have not seen, I have only seen some song bits on TV.

VG : I know the lyric writer, it was Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram. He wrote all the songs and all the songs were hits.

RG : Why am I asking you is when I asked him what kind of film was this 'Paasavalai'. He told me that there was a very old stage play called Ali Bahadur Shah and this was a rehash of Ali Bahadur Shah. Was 'Paasavalai' about a man who leaves his wife under certain circumstances, she undergoes a lot of things and they come to something like that?

VG : Yes, yes.

RG : This was Ali Bahadur Shah.

VG : That's right this is some kind of a, you know a folklore story a social, happened 200-300 years ago.

RG : That was Ali Bahadur Shah which was a very popular stage play.

VG : In which I played M. K. Radha's younger brother. Then of course I become a dog. And then there was a girl which sings (Tamil song).

RG : Who was this girl who sang?

VG : She was called Lololo Rajamani. She became popular like Ka ka ka in (Tamil Film Title).

RG : Rajamani was the girl who played the role in the film.

VG : That girl who makes love to me or is interested in me.

RG: Is she still around I don't think so?

VG: Maybe she was.

RG: Not prominent.

VG: Not prominent.

RG: And who sang that song some of the playback singers?

VG: Yeah a famous playback singer.

RG: And who directed this Paasavalai?

VG: T. R. Sundaram.

RG: T. R. Sundaram. You don't remember Veppathur Kittu being on the sets.

VG: No, no. I don't remember it at all. In fact there was one Mr. Nagarajan a police man, red line only. He was very much involved in 'Paasavalai', 'Aravalli' days. Like this Acharya and others.

RG: Was Acharya there at that time? He did some Kalyani or something like that for Modern theatres.

VG: I have no idea.

RG: He was not around when Ali Bahadur Shah was made?

VG: No this was you know, it was a kind of an institution where not much freedom was given to artists, even heroes. And all we had to do was to report to work, finish the work, come back to our den.

RG: Was he a very strict disciplinarian T. R. Sundaram?

VG: Oh yes.

RG: I've heard a lot of stories about him.

VG : Oh yes, yes. In fact, there were what 3,000 feet of Alibaba shot without M. G. R. in Alibaba and the forty thieves.

RG : Well he didn't report to work.

VG : Yes, yes. He was absent and there was one Mr. Karadi Muthu who had a lot of hair just like M. G. R.. He was dressing up like M. G. R. and ask him to (Tamil dialogue).

RG : What was Karadi Muthu doing at that time?

VG : He was a stunt man or a worker there in Modern Theatres. Very well built and things like that Perfect dupe for M. G. R. (Tamil dialogue).

RG : Talking of Mr. T. R. Sundaram. Muktha Srinivasan, who was one of his assistants and practically began his film career.

VG : Last assistant to T. R. Sundaram. He used to sort of make copies of scripts.

RG : Yeah I know, he told me that. He tells me, he used to tell me quite a few times that Mr. T. R. Sundaram was highly feudal in his approach and in his treatment of his assistant staff and even artists.

VG : That's right

RG : Is that right? Can you throw some light on it?

VG : He was a guy you know like Hollywood you know. I am paying this man for a job that's all. And you know there will be tiffin carriers with Sivaji Ganesan's name, my name and everything. At 11:30 he will give you some small eats and tea. And that's about all. You know like the producers going and begging artist and what will you like to eat. Shall I get it from bohari? Or shall I get it from this and that. All that was not thought of by Mr. T. R. Sundaram. He was a man who said I am the boss, I am having a job and giving you money, come and do his work. Report correct time you know they will say (Tamil Dialogue).

RG : Nothing special for them.

VG : Nothing special for them (Tamil dialogue). One person, they say that, he treated very well was Chandrababu. And believe it or not, in 'Paasavalai', he offered me a cigarette in the sets.

RG : Who T. R. Sundaram?

VG : Mr. T. R. Sundaram. Because I was an educated man. I was an MA. And of course those days I was not smoking. And it has been never heard of that a man smoked inside the studios, the entire studios, not only in the floor, in Modern theatres nobody smoked a cigarette. that was the respect T. R. S. had. He was himself a smoker. He offered me a cigarette that kind of respect I had from him. Maybe he thought that these people just deserve that much. Even supposed to have tied Jamuna up in a tree. And then you know better finish your shot or else. The door was closed and nobody even superintendent of police can't get into modern theatres you know like that.

RG : Why am I asking you is, two incidents which are very green in my memory.

VG : No for instance, you see he may not have allowed Mukta Srinivasan to sit before him for hours, since T. R. S. will stretch his legs on a stool and people around will be standing. All that you can consider feudal.

RG : No, I will tell you one incident which is very interesting about this chair business. R. M. Krishnaswami, R. M. K., was a cameraman for Modern Theatres. He shot quite a few films like 'Sulochna' and even parts of this 'Digambara Samiyar'. And these problems, R. M. K. was himself a hot-tempered man as you know. I believe in the sets when R. M. K. was working there, there used to be only one chair on the entire stage, sound stage and it was meant for T. R. Sundaram. And that was the time when 'Digambar Samiyar' was being made.

VG : With Mr. Nambiar as hero.

RG : And R. M. K. had some problem in standing and operating the camera. And he told him, "Look dear Mr. Sundaram, I am not asking for a seat on a matter of prestige or honour or anything. This is for convenience for me to work. Otherwise you can't get good stuff out of me for which you are paying. And Sundaram thought that R. M. K. had some point. And a stool was made, not a chair. A stool was made and that was given to R. M. K to sit behind the camera and work. And people used to pat him on the back that he was the first man to get such a privilege in Modern Theatres. And this was going on. And one day when he came back, R. M. K. found that after sitting on the stool he was not able to reach the eyepiece at the same level as he did the previous evening. So he thought that was somewhat intriguing naturally. Suddenly when you go down, whether the floor has sunk or something like that has happened. So he was looking around the stool. And then he found that it was slightly shorter.

VG : The stool.

RG : The stool was shorter. So he asked the floor in charge, the production assistant whoever, what's happening. He said (Tamil dialogue) and this became a matter of argument and R. M. K. said the very afternoon he left. And somebody else took over. And this incident he always used to talk to his students. And Mukta Srinivasan told me another incident. Which should be true because this was a treatment given which no man normally would confess. He said something on the sets, which upset Mr. Sundaram so much. That Srinivasan told me that he was whipped on the sets with a cane by him. And that's what prompted Srinivasan to leave Modern Theatres on the dot, on the spot and go to Jupiter where he joined S. Balachander as his assistant and worked in 'Kaithi' and those films. This is obviously true because no man will say that director whipped me on the sets.

VG : He worked even in 'Andha Naal'.

RG : Later for AVM. Did you hear of any such things when you were there? You did two films you said and other films later.

VG : No but these whipping incidents I have heard. Not only Srinivasan, many others have had this treatment. But whipping in particularly...

RG : But what made him do these kind of things? Was he a sadist or something like that? Sadism or...

VG : He was perfectly justified in thinking you know that he was the boss. All these people are paid by him and whole kind of you know stars, that kind of type you know.

RG : This boss business. A. S. A. Sami did some films for him. Some of them like 'Kaithi Kannayiram' and one day he was, and A. S. A. Sami again being an Hons. graduate, supposed to be from London University, Sundaram used to treat him very well. At that time, he was a named director also. So, one day he came after playing his tennis, I believe he used to come and sit in the lawns after playing tennis, Mr. Sundaram. He found that there is nobody on the sets. Totally silent. So, he called the production people and said what happened. They said (Tamil dialogue). So, A. S. A. Sami was asked to meet Mr. Sundaram, the next morning before he went for shooting. He did some song at that time, Rajya Sulochana and some others. So, he was wondering what had gone wrong and everything was coming off well and so he went and Mr. Sami, sit down, I want to talk to you about something. Yes sir, what is it? What happened yesterday I believe the shooting was over at 4'o clock.....So I packed it. No, no, no, no you shouldn't do that. It was a little strange for a producer to talk. Even the workers, these people are paid to work till 6 or 7 or whatever it was. Even if you had finished it, you must go on

taking some shot or the other or retake something even if they are ok. And keep them working until the gong went off. So Sami like any moviemaker asked, what about all the negative. He said don't bother about the picture negative or sound negative. I am paying for that. With exactly the words he said, I am repeating to you right now, he said, I am paying for the picture negative why are you bothered. My point is they must be kept working. This is like a factory. When the gong goes at 6'o clock or 7'o clock, they are let out. There is no question of work is over. You take the same shot from another angle, you are a creative filmmaker. Take a two-shot, take close-ups, put a trolley.

VG : He had done about 100 pictures.

RG : Yeah he was very successful.

VG : First colour picture he has made. First English picture he has made.

RG : He was a very successful filmmaker. Obviously, there was something in the system he devised.

VG : Shri Ram Naidu was like that, that kind of autocrat. In fact, the first day I went into the studio, I went in whistling.

RG : For 'Ezhai Padam Padu'?

VG : Yeah. And then some Raghavan production I said you can't whistle here. I said put a board there don't whistle, otherwise I will whistle. And I had a big confrontation with him and he ordered a shoot without Mr. Ramnoth.

RG : Ramnoth was the director of the film. What happened to Mr. Ramnoth?

VG : No, that unfortunate day Mrs. Ramnoth had an abortion.

RG : And he didn't want to work, he couldn't work.

VG : All the three of us were 'chelas' of Ramnoth. Ramnoth introduced Nagaiah, Ramnoth introduced Javar Seetharaman. I owe my very existence to Mr. Ramnoth. All the three main players, we all removed make-up and went to see Mr. Ramnoth sort of sit with him. He said no no, who the hell asked them to go, Mr. T. R. S. said (Tamil). A man rushed up to Glens that's where we were all staying and said (Tamil).

RG : You told him.

VG : I remember. I must have been 18-19. Then Naidu sent for me and said what is it I believe you said that you won't act if I direct. Have you given anything like that in the contract, he asked me. I said have I given anything in contract I will not if you direct, I asked him straight. That night a first class ticket was taken and I was sent home.

RG : To Madras?

VG : Yes. Cut. And my role in that film was done by Ragini. That is a song sequence where Lalita is dreaming about me, I am going in a chariot with Padmini. All that, that entire sequence is about 5 minutes, 6 minutes.

RG : The song sequence.

VG : The song sequence. Entire thing is song. Ragini used to have you know (Tamil) those days.

RG : Her head was shaved.

VG : And she had a cap. I was having a congress cap myself (Tamil). We looked very much alike you know, she looked like me, or she would pass off or. The entire sequence was shot by....

RG : How did he manage his close-ups? There were no close-ups at all?

VG : May be there were not, he avoided or you know. In those days people were not very keen, I only knew that.

RG : It is still there, Ragini in the sequence?

VG : Yes, yes still there.

RG : Even today in the film?

VG : Oh yes, still there. In fact, recently I told you, not recently in the sense, about 10 years back, Sivaji and I saw this film, 'Ezhai Padum Padu'. He wanted to remake it, himself playing Jean ValiJean. But then two parts of which have come in this film made with...

RG : 'Yannavali'

VG : ‘Yannavali’. Except the third part is not there. The first two parts are there. Then what ‘Naane Raja’, ‘Paasavalai’, ‘Aaravalli’.

RG : ‘Aaravalli’ is a film which I remember seeing when I was a student. With G. Varalakshmi and I think it was not a very good film.

VG : It was not, but it was successful.

RG : Was it successful?

VG : Not as much as ‘Paasavalai’, but it was successful.

RG : I remember that song (Tamil Song).

VG : S. G. Ishwaran was the..

RG : What did Ishwaran do? Gemini Ganeshan’s cousin, he was a film mediator or something like that.

VG : Mr. T. R. Sundaram used to plan things very well. See for instance, supposing there were half a dozen matte shots in one feet, let’s say. So, you know he will take the first matte shot and ask the artists to change their dresses, it will be for scene no. 35, let’s say. Take those matte shots, change dresses, for scene no. 79, take matte shots and like that. So, it was you know he was really using time very well.

RG : Saving time, that’s the way it should be done also.

VG : He was doing all that very well.

RG : That means he had his script planned very well in advance.

VG : (Tamil) He didn’t mean any disrespect but that was his way.

RG : Was he anglicized having been educated in England with a foreign wife and all that?

VG : I don’t think so.

RG : You don’t think so, he was a typical Magaliyar.

VG : Magaliyar. And his son, he behaves like a Tamilian (Tamil).

RG : And what are the other films you did after Aaravalli?

VG : After Aaravalli I have done at least 10-12 films there in Modern Theatres. Some of these Krishnamurthy's films, Chitramahal Krishnamurthy's films were all shot there.

RG : What did you do much later?

VG : Like Ranjan, I did some films with Jai Shankar, Shivkumar, number of films I did with Modern Theatres.

RG : After this 'Aaravalli', you came back to Madras? The third film you said was not, that option was not taken up.

VG : It was not taken up but then I did, I started doing films here in Madras. Not very you know regular work. It was not many at the same time. In fact, remember one year in 1961, I worked one day as an actor and that was.

RG : The entire year.

VG : The entire year. And that was 31st December 1961. The other 364 days I used to read books and see cinemas and you know. This film was called 'Kathirunda Kangal'.

RG : It was done by T. Prakash Rao.

VG : T. Prakash Rao.. Venus Pictures. Backing one film called Ramu Quality Pictures. Ramu made that picture. I worked only one day in the entire year. And that was released in somehow, I think July/August 1962 in Chitra talkies. Superhit again. Mr. Kamal Ghosh was the cameraman for that film. Black and White film. It was based on a Bette Davis film. Bette Davis and Glenn Ford, 'A Stolen Life'.

RG : A Stolen Life. Because I am asking you I don't know whether you are aware, T. Prakash Rao and I, we did a Tamil film together in '82

VG : I met him this morning, today (Tamil).

RG : And we used to talk about, we made it in Telugu which was a miserable flop. And he told me that he lost 5 lakhs on that venture which was the biggest loss he had ever suffered in movies. And that setback a lot of things for him and he even said in a way I am still recovering from this loss. Somehow it flopped, with Sujata playing that role which was played by Savitri in the original. At the time he said that.

(Audio breaks)

RG : Gopi, the other day we stopped talking with 'Aaravalli', which was Modern Theatres, T. R. Sundaram production. From the list of films you have done so far, very impressive reading. About 300 movies you have done, which I was not aware of myself, a huge figure. I see that..

VG : Compared to Manorama or VK Ramaswamy.....

RG : They have done more I suppose

VG : Manorama has done thousands. Guinness Book of World Records. And Thenga, I think did about 900 odd and V. K. R. and Major. And many long career, 300 is not very impressive.

RG : Anyway. I see that you have made a film in '59 called 'Aval Yar'. This was by our K. J. Mahadevan.

VG : Originally from K. J. Mahadevan.

RG : Gemini, Jairam's son.

VG : He left Gemini Studios and he did not know anything about filmmaking outside Gemini Studios. Like this (Tamil) he used to say.

RG : Like a frog in the well.

VG : That's right.

RG : What exactly do you mean, what was he doing in Gemini? He was called Production Controller or something like that.

VG : Like you know they had about 10-12 people, he was also one of those in the creative section. And he did some pictures in Gemini, like 'Rajee En Kanmani' that was a flop.

RG : That was Chaplin's.

VG : That was based on Chaplin's film and then even a song, French song called La Paloma (Tamil song). Like that South Indian girl singing.

RG: Yeah Bala Saraswati sang.

VG: There is a doll.

RG: Talking of this film I remember K. J. Mahadevan once told me, that he shot a ballet sequence for 'Rajee En Kanmani' which Vasana did not permit him to include in the main film because he thought it was too high brow for a South Indian film. You know it was remade in Telugu also as 'Rajee Naa Pranam'. So he said, Mahadevan this will be too high brow for a South Indian audience. Few others like you who are westernized or some kind of orientation to (Tamil dialogue). He said he even had that reel with him which he brought with him when he left Gemini. And he was threatening to show it to me but that never came through.

[90 mins]

VG: You know this film he had Sivaji Ganesan signed for a main role.

RG: In what, 'Aval Yar'?

VG: Yes 'Aval Yar'. With Pandari Bai, me playing a role a sort of a lover to Pandari Bai. And Sivaji Ganesan played a judge in that film.

RG: Was this adapted from any English novel or film because he was mostly adapting.

VG: I am sure it was, but I am not able to trace the original. But this is a lawyer who became a judge. K. J. Mahadevan himself being a kind of a lawyer.

RG: Lawyer's son.

VG: Very much in his blood. But funnily enough Sivaji and K. J. Mahadevan did not click and...

RG: So what went wrong?

VG: You know K. J. M.'s way of working. And finally, when the picture was released K. J. Mahadevan's picture 'Aval Yar', Sivaji Ganesan had worked about hardly 5 to 6 days in that film.

RG: Entire film and he was the main character.

VG : He was the main character. And on that day 'Aval Yar' was released in Casino, 'Bhaaga Pirivinai' was released in Chitra Talkies.

RG : His other movie with the main role

VG : And (indecipherable) was managing all Shivaji's affairs those days, told K. J. M. not to release the picture the same day.

RG : I see.

VG : Mahadevan you know being meticulous you know, I have said that I have to release it. And he released it. And didn't find a very good run. 'Bhaaga Pirivinai' was a bigger success.

RG : Yeah very big success.

VG : Subsequent efforts were also not very successful like...

RG : He made a picture called 'Hello Mister Zamindar'.

VG : That's right, it was again about, I think It had something to do with again a western Wodehouse.

RG : It was a poor effort, it recently ran on TV.

VG : M. R. Radha plays a barber. And very funny sequence where with the razors, the barber will sing the song. And I was singing that anyone who will get his throat cut. Gemini Ganesan was there.

RG : That was 'Hello Mister Zamindar'.

VG : 'Hello Mister Zamindar'. M. R. Radha, myself and others. That's about all I can tell you about ...

RG : or about KJ Mahadevan himself. And then this 'Azhagarmalai Kalvan'.

VG : That's right. See I had five pictures released in '59.

RG : Whose film was this, this 'Azhagarmalai Kalvan'?

VG : Mr. Kempuraj Urs.

RG : Oh Kempraj Urs' production. At that time, he was in Madras.

VG : He was in Madras. He had already made a picture with Bhanumathi.

RG : With Bhanumathi?

VG : Yes something with...

RG : His first film was made with Jayamma, Pandari Bai and others. It was a mythological thing which was on floors for a very long time.

VG : Yes, yes that's the one I am talking about.

RG : There is no Bhanumathi in it.

VG : Yes yes, he did a film with Bhanumathi. It was shot in (indecipherable) studios and they even put up forest set which became real forest with animals, you know coming up, insects and snakes and things like that. It was about 3-4 months Kempraj and Bhanumathi were not on talking terms.

RG : 'Nala Damayanti'. 'Nala Damayanti' probably was his second production.

VG : 'Nala Damayanti'. And he made a film called some Kottai....

RG : 'Karkottai'. It was supposed to be Monte Cristo.

VG : Yeah, absolutely right. Where Jayalalithaa's mother.....

RG : Sandhya.

VG : Played a role in 'Karkottai'. After all that he made this 'Azhagarmalai Kalvan' where Balaji and myself were the two heroes.

RG : Balaji was new to the screen at that time as an actor.

VG : Coming up as an actor. It was '58, released in '59. And my heroine was Vijayakumari and his was one Malini.

RG : I know that Malini. She is still around in a very bad shape.

VG : Yeah and 'Azhagarmalai Kalvan' was released. A plan that is very interesting incident where I thought that this man, this music writer Vaali write his first song.

RG : You introduced him into films.

VG : You can say so, I took him to Kempuraj.

RG : He told me that.

VG : And he wrote a lullaby song which was sung by Susheela.

RG : P. Susheela.

VG : And the music director was one Mr. Gopalam.

RG : I know the Telugu B. Gopalam. He used to work for Vauhini.

VG : And Vaali wrote his first song in 'Azhagarmalai Kalvan'. And then after of course, about four years he never had a second break.

RG : Who, Vaali?

VG : Vaali, he waited quite a long time. His second break was in a film called 'Nallavan Vazhvan'.

RG : Was it for M. G. R.?

VG : M. G. R..

RG : The title suggests that.

VG : That's right. Seerkazhi sang that song. And this Kempuraj was you know unusual filmmaker.

RG : In what way?

VG : He was very uncompromising. Again, like Mr T. R. Sundaram he was an aristocrat himself. That's how the ego complex, the conflict came between him and Bhanumathi in the picture. For instance, this Vijayakumari was then somebody's wife. And she said this guy Gopalakrishnan should not touch me.

RG : Who, Vijayakumari? At that time, she was a small fry In 1958.

VG : Still I mean probably she had just come into movies. And she probably thought that she had an image, an illusion about the acting. And Mr. Kempraj said you know my dear lady this Gopalakrishnan has no desire to touch you with a barge pole. That he's doing it because I am asking him to, compelling him to you know and paying him that he should touch you. And she went and she did not come back after lunch.

RG : I see, Vijayakumari?

VG : Yeah. And this man had given her a cheque and then he stopped payment at the bank. Don't pay that money to that lady. The next morning, she promptly turned up and allowed me to touch her wherever I wanted to. That's an interesting incident. That picture didn't do very well. I suppose after that I don't know he made any movies but then he.

RG : You know I knew Kempraj, not in movies you know he was running a small scale industry for some time.

VG : Aluminium.

RG : Aluminium things.

VG : And much later than films.

RG : Yes much later than films. At that time, I used to be a stockbroking executive. He used to come to the firm and later when he went back to Bangalore and I was involved in filmmaking in Bangalore, I used to see him very frequently because he took over the Film Development Corporation.

VG : Oh yes.

RG : When Devaraj Urs became the chief minister, he got into it. And I found him a very interesting man.

VG : He was yes, he was.

RG : Talk to him and he had done a lot of movies earlier in Kannada.

VG : He was, actually he wanted to become an actor.

RG : He was an actor. You know he made a big splash in Kannada, one of the early movies of Kannada. I think it was Krishna Leela in which he played Khamsa which was a very major success for him. And later on, one or two movies. That is how he came to Madras. You know in those days they were not making many films in Kannada. So, he came down to Madras. He used to tell me about all that. He had a couple of daughters who used to model also.

VG : Yes, yes, yes. His son in law is also a big model. Lakshman, he was in (Indecipherable) Corporation.

RG : He went back and of course. That is again probably based on some foreign film. He was always adapting.

VG : Obviously yes.

RG : And then this 'Thaai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali', was it an M. G. R. film?

VG : This was the first film I worked with M. G. R. in the year 1958 again.

RG : Did you know him earlier?

VG : I have seen him.

RG : But not met or known?

VG : Not very close.

RG : I see.

VG : As I told you my younger sister was in a film called 'Raja Mukthi' which was....

RG : It was introduced by Bhagavathar, M. G. R. and V. N. Janaki.

VG : They were in it. And at that time, I have seen him, he knows me, I knew him.

RG : It was made in Pune, at Prabhat Studio.

VG : And this another 'Thaai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali' was a story by C. N. Annadurai and the dialogues were written by Arangannal and Mr. R. R. Chandran who as I said brought me back to films in 'Naane Raja', he was the cameraman.

RG: It was a Thevar production, Chinnappa Thevar.

VG: No, no.

RG: How was he involved in?

VG: 'Thaai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali' was R. R. Chandran's picture.

RG: Not Thevar's.?

VG: Not Thevar's.

RG: I see.

VG: In fact, in Thevar's first film that was 'Thaai Sollai Thattadhe'.

RG: He made a big splash.

VG: R. R. Chandran was the cameraman in that film.

RG: I see

VG: That's how it started. and R. R. Chandran had a personal liking for me. And every Deepawali in fact he used to call me to his house and present me with dhoties and shirts. And he used to take me to Kanchipuram every time he went to see Mr. Annadurai and Annadurai himself being a Pachaiyappa's College student and I did my intermediate there, he liked me. And that very little of that story was in the film except the climax where the tai ties a thali to the daughter you see.

RG: How did that come, was it some kind of a revolutionary thinking, as it is rather odd?

VG: The daughter makes a mistake.

RG: In marrying somebody.

VG: And she doesn't have a thali. So, the mother passes it to her. Kannamba played the mother.

RG: Was it again adapted from anything else? Why am I asking you is, now when you say that daughter did not have a thali and mother gives it. Couple of years ago there

was a film in Telugu which was one of the biggest successes of recent years. And which was not a stunt film. In Telugu they know they go for action, violence, sex. Here the daughter finds out that her mother was not legally married to her father.

VG : Yes, I know this Sarath Babu.

RG : Sarath Babu, some Swati Mutyam or something like that. And then she legitimizes mother's marriage. I wonder if the explanation was something like this.

VG : No, no, no. But here the daughter actually gets the mother married again.

RG : I see. Yeah that's right she was not legally married. Why am I asking you is this Mr Annadurai, like most of the film writers and other writers of India, also used to adapt.

VG : Oh yes, he was you know a chronic film goer.

RG : Like 'Nallathambi' was Mr Deeds Goes To Town, things like that. And even his 'Velaikaari', except the original play, to which they added a lot of things. A. S. A. Sami told me about how he brought in Monte Cristo. The revenge part of it is from Monte Cristo. And this man finding the dead body, K. R. Ramasami finds a dead body and that he resembles him and he takes over his identity and things like that. Again, there are several novels and there are also two very interesting real life cases, crime cases. I don't know whether you have heard of it. One in England and one in India. In England there was a case called Tichborne Claim case. The Tichborne was some kind of a Duke where Tichborne Duke was lost as a boy. He never came back again. And somebody suddenly after few years came and said I am the man. And the resemblance between the two was so remarkable that most people had to accept that he was so and so, except a faithful old servant who said this man is a fake. And he took it to court, the claimant went to court. That's why this case is called Tichborne Claimant case. Where you know the brilliant lawyer of England was able to buy sheer force of his cross examination, proved that this fellow was a fake. And he was sentenced for perjury. This is one of the sensational cases of England. This Tichborne, also cited as one of the best examples of cross examination in court, I have read it as a lawyer. There was another case in India, again a true-life story, which was called Bavalpur Sanyasi case. Bavalpur was a kind of zamindari in Bengal where the Zamindar was supposed to have died. And he was taken to the cremation ground. There was a sudden storm, this all actually happened in that, not a movie. There was a sudden storm and the people ran away, leaving the dead body. After a few months, a few years. somebody came and said I am the Zamindar. He said you all left me. I was not really dead. There was thunder and lightning and that woke me up. And I found out that I was all tied up and was going to be burnt or buried in a cremation ground and untied all those ropes and escaped. And

he had so many remarkable resemblances. Even to the extent of having a scar on his penis, as a result of some operation, even that he had. But zamindar's wife refused to believe that's her husband. A woman can always find out I suppose. And this claimant went to court. And finally, it was not proved that he was a Zamindar. And it went to adopted son and all that. This claim has a book, the entire trial, I have read it when I was in college, I had a copy of it for a long time. And this part of it in 'Velaikkari' was obviously inspired either by Tichborne Case or Bavalpur Sanyasi. And this Bavalpur Sanyasi was actually made into a film in Bengali. I think it was called 'Ratnadeep' or something like that. Later it was even dubbed into Tamil. This was the case itself, a remake. So, I was wondering whether this kind of adaptation was going on.

VG: Could be. Because you know Mr Annadurai used to read a lot.

RG: Voracious reader.

VG: And he used to see a lot of films, so influenced him.

RG: You had a personal intimacy with him because you said you met so many times.

VG: Can't say intimate, but I used to meet him quite often, in making of that film. And we have gone to Kanjivaram quite a few times, Chandran and myself.

RG: And M. G. R., probably one of his early films, and he was not yet a superstar at that time.

VG: No, he was not. And there he was actually supposed to play a circus man, a trapeze player.

RG: Oh M. G. R..

VG: And I was also a trapeze player. And somehow that was the time when Mr. M. G. R. had the accident, you know this.

RG: He broke his leg or something.

VG: He broke his tibia in a play. And he was in bed for about 6 months. I used to see him very often, almost every day.

RG: At the hospital?

VG: At the home, here in Lloyd's Road.

RG: Lloyd's Road. You have been staying on the Lloyd's Road.

VG: Lloyd's Road house. And then I used to read something to him you know, talk to him, things like that. And this was the first picture released after his fracture.

RG: 'Thaai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali'. Who was the heroine in that Tamil film?

VG: Jamuna.

RG: Jamuna, the Telugu artist.

VG: And it was released on 31st December 1959. Somehow this 31st December has a lot of...

RG: Things to do in your life.

VG: Yeah, released in Paragon theatres. And as usual huge hullabaloo, and big crowd. The picture was not a very big hit. But then the man said it was not very big, but was big enough, throwing water and things like that.

RG: Chandran directed it? Or who directed it?

VG: Chandran directed it. Produced and directed it.

RG: Producer and director.

VG: It was actually the next release after his 'Nadodi Mannan'.

RG: So, it came after 'Nadodi Mannan'.

VG: 'Nadodi Mannan' was '58, August 22nd. It was supposed to release on August 15, but one week later released it. After a year and 3-4 months this 'Thaai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali' was released. Big expectation.

RG: Naturally. With M. G. R., Annadurai and all those big names.

VG: Arangannal.

RG: Arangannal thrown into it. 'Nadodi Mannan', did you have any role in that?

VG : I didn't act in the film, but I was very close to M. G. R. those days. In fact, I used to be with him every shooting day.

RG : You were on the sets with M. G. R.?

VG : Yes I was on the sets with M. G. R..

RG : He directed it himself?

VG : He directed it himself, totally. Completely.

RG : Was he on sets placing the camera?

VG : Everything was done by him. In fact, I think they started with Mr. Late K. Subramanyam for the first two days. But somehow, they didn't get on together.

RG : I once heard, Mr. R. M. Veerappan, tell me, I have written some songs for his movies, you know in which you also acted. He told me that the original director of 'Nadodi Mannan', at the time they were planning it, was supposed to be Ramnoth. Because M. G. R., I believe was a very great admirer of Mr. Ramnoth's work, maybe after 'Marma Yogi'. Must have even known him earlier. And in fact, I believe even a token advance was either paid or offered to Mr. Ramnoth and by the time they could think of the movie, plan it, and come up. At the time M. G. R. was not that big as you know, Ramnoth had died. And then only M. G. R. himself thought that he could try his hand.

VG : This K. Subramanyam was there on the sets for the first two days of 'Nadodi Mannan'.

RG : Oh I see. He only told me about Ramnoth.

VG : And later on, Mr. M. G. R. took it up on his own. And there was some small difference of opinion between him and Bhanumathi. And he removed her and put Saroja Devi.

RG : Saroja Devi at that time was just coming up.

VG : Just coming up. She had done (indecipherable film title - Thirudadey) or one or two films. And that part of it was shot in colour. Saroja Devi's part, last 5-6 reels. I remember Mr. M. G. R. and myself, we went to a place called Chingam, a little beyond Tiruvannamalai, a day before the release of 'Nadodi Manan'.

RG: What took you there, both of you?

VG: It was M. G. R.'s play (indecipherable -Play Title).

RG: (indecipherable -Play Title).

VG: It was staged there. He made a number of plays called (indecipherable - Multiple Play Titles). And this G. Shakuntala was, Pushpalata and others were you know were bit parts players. And he left Madras around 6-6:30.

RG: You were not in the play?

VG: I was not in the play.

RG: You accompanied M. G. R.?

VG: I just was a good friend of his, that's all. And he used to take vegetarian food, just for me. You know Idli Dosa Chutney. Even spoons and everything separately kept for me (Tamil dialogue). So we reach a particular place about 20-30 miles before we used to stop. Eat and then when we were leaving Madras, it was drizzling. And we went to (indecipherable name)'s house in Tiruvannamalai.

RG: (indecipherable name)? Even at that time he had no name?

VG: Yes, yes, a party man. And as we were getting into Chingam. It was about 10 30.

RG: In the night?

VG: Yeah. And the convention was that only after M. G. R. arrives, tickets have to be sold for the play. Thousands of people waiting and there were no seats. It's an open-air auditorium.

RG: People sat on the ground.

VG: People have to sit on the ground. It was all mushy you know.

RG: Because of the rain.

VG: Because of the rain. So Mr. M. G. R. took the mic and said it is all raining, you know. Women and children all have to sit on this wet floor. I will come tomorrow and I will

do this play and why not we cancel it. So, the audience said what is the guarantee it won't rain tomorrow, now that you are here please act. So, tickets were given and you know M. G. R. normally has a shave before the play. About 11 they started. Full house. I was sitting in the fifth-sixth row. And there was a slight drizzle also. The orchestra was taken on to the stage because of the rain. And a Turkey towel was sent to me. Turkish towel, was sent to me around the fifth-sixth scene you know to cover my head. M. G. R. had seen me sitting and exposed to rain. So he sends me a towel.

RG : Very thoughtful of him.

VG : And the play ended by about 2:30. And they wanted him to speak after that.

RG : After the play, at 2:30 in the morning.

VG : Yeah they said (Tamil dialogue). Then M. G. R. speaks to them. And we leave about 3 o'clock. On the way to Madras. He was not very well. He had some stomach problems. And down the way back to Madras we even met K. V. Mahadevan.

RG : Music director, where was he?

VG : He was going somewhere. We reached Madras around 9 in the morning. That day was the first show of 'Nadodi Mannan' at Vijaya Gardens. So, Sanjay said, Gopi (Tamil dialogue). So, he sends me by car. I was in Mylapore those days. I go to my house and had a wash and all that. Go back to Vijaya Gardens and by about interval, I felt that the entire audience was with M. G. R.. They liked the picture. They were with us. So, I told Mr. Chakrapani.

RG : Brother.

VG : Yes brother (Tamil dialogue)

RG : The brother told you.

VG : The brother told me. So, I rang him up. Like Police officers you know who pick up their phone as soon as it rings you know. The first tring, he picked it up. And he said Gopi (Tamil dialogue). As you know, he had told me that the picture ran he was a Mannan (Tamil dialogue) and if the picture failed, he was Nadodi. He had sunk his last shirt on it. Like Vasan in Chandralekha (Tamil dialogue). The picture is over. About the time it was over, he came. Came as you know that he has a way of dealing with these people you know, sort of put his hand around. And shakes and ask (Tamil dialogue). There was a lunch.

RG : At Vijaya Gardens.

VG : At Vijaya Gardens. And of course, the picture you know made history. As a hero in dual role plus as a director for the first time. It made a very big mark. That's how I was associated with 'Nadodi Mannan'.

RG : 'Nadodi Mannan'. After that I think you made number of movies with him, where you played his senior officer.

VG : I made quite a few films with him up to 'Indru Pol Endrum Vaazhga' which was written by one of our ex ministers, Kalimuthu.

RG : Yes Kalimuthu.

VG : And the 100th day celebration was done after M. G. R. became the chief minister. The first film function he attended in (indecipherable) hotel. And the producer gave us a plastic shield worth about two and a half rupees.

RG : Who was that producer?

VG : One Late Lakshman Chettiar.

RG : Not Lena?

VG : No, no, no. This man Lakshman Chettiar had died a little after the function. But he takes the cake for giving us the most measly shield.

RG : Or the Cheapest. Now one of the films I see in your bio is 'Paadhai Theriyudhu Paar'. Was it supposed to be a new wave kind of movie?

VG : Yes, yes, nouvelle vague.

RG : Nouvelle vague. Can you tell us something about that?

VG : M. B. Sreenivasan.

RG : M. B. Sreenivasan.

VG : One of our famous.

RG: Jayakanthan I think wrote some.

VG: Jayakanthan wrote some songs.

RG: Yes wrote some songs for it, that's what he told me once.

VG: This was an attempt where 20-30 people had pooled their money and...

RG: Co-operative venture was it?

VG : A small budget film. Like Damodaran who was a transport owner from (indecipherable - Salemnau)

RG: Yeah I know him. They were also supposed to be slightly leftists.

VG: Not slightly.

RG: Very much leftist.

VG: Confirmed leftist. And they made this film and they brought this Vijayant who was another famous director. Who was then working in some Rockfort railway service.

RG: Was he on the stage or something?

VG: No, no, he had never been on the stage before.

RG: Just another leftist I suppose.

VG: Maybe.

RG: Trade unionist or something.

VG: He was brought and this film was made with L. Vijayalakshmi.

RG: Who was then a dancer and then became an actress.

VG : And S. V. Subbaiah was there. Mr. S. V. Sahasranamam. I had done a role in the film. It was supposedly a sort of small budget. But I don't think it clicked in any way. It was not a big success and they dropped this kind of you know further ventures after this.

RG : Low budget films. One thing that people remember and I am sure you know about that, having acted in it. This M. B. Sreenivasan came out with a couple of catchy tunes.

VG : Good songs yes.

RG : 'Mookuthiyaam'. And I believe that was the first time in Tamil film where the xylophone was used as a main, you know that entire song the accompaniment is only the xylophone. It makes that kind of noise. You know now they are using it as ad nauseam in all sorts of situations. When M. B. Sreenivasan once told me that he was trying to experiment with that kind of instrument. And this was a film in which he could try and it was quite successful.

VG : Yes it was.

RG : Sreenivasan sang that (Tamil song) and all that sort of songs you know.

VG : But M. B. Sreenivasan somehow, very unfortunately, never made the top grade in Tamil films.

RG : Maybe because of his political views, that's what he tells me.

VG : I don't know because you see, whatever your political views are, or whatever your even personal habits are, you are sought after if your last picture has clicked.

RG : That is universal.

VG : You are as good or as bad as your last picture. And I mean not that any successful man today is liked very much by people who hire him.

RG : Sometimes it's far from it.

VG : Yeah so I think M. B. Sreenivasan never clicked in a big way, though I have a great respect for N. B. S.....

(Audio breaks)

RG : We were talking about M. B. Sreenivasan. His position as a music director. In Malayalam, he was one of the leading music director. Which attributes to Malayalam film makers being somewhat leftist. The state itself is supposed to be left oriented. You know one interesting thing, he is very down to earth, you should have known that aspect. He once, we were conducting a course at the South Indian film directors

Association of which I am one of the vice presidents. I conducted, I was the dean, as we called ourselves, of the course. And M. B. Sreenivasan was called to talk about music direction and particularly about the scoring of background music or re-recorded music. And because the students were mostly assistant directors, associate director and there were even some directors And some of the established directors like R. Rammurthi. And even B. N. Reddy attended one of my classes. He said we just wanted to know what's going on. And some of the interesting anecdotes I normally narrate, probably brought them old memories. Senior directors used to come for that, Muktha Srinivasan came for one or two sessions. And this particular day, when M. B. Sreenivasan was talking, maybe because he was not used by Tamil cinema as you said, he had some kind of an inner suppressed anger. He said, so far as re-recording of music for Tamil cinema is concerned, you need not know music. And the way he said it, people laughed. Everyone is involved in film making, it is not a lay audience (Tamil dialogue). He had a blackboard in the class on the wall. Somebody wanted to draw some camera position and things like that. So he took a piece of chalk and then wrote there if you know four words in Tamil or its equivalent in any other language, you can score re-recording music for any Tamil film. Again, people laughed. That simple. He said it's only a very good magic formula. And those of you who are going to be involved, they were in suggesting background music, they were all directors. Not directly compose music but you will have a hand in telling the music director what kind of thing you want. You just learn these four words, you can possibly become music director also. Later on, quite a few directors have taken to music composing also, whether they know music or not, that's a different story. So he said these four words are, in Tamil the entire (Tamil word) music use this formula. Silcha, Sitar, Satta, Shehnai. So, if the situation is one of joy, you play the sitar. If it's one of agony or grief, you play the shehnai. Learn these four words, you have learned the re-recording music of Tamil Cinema. And everybody was laughing and clapping. He looked at me, he looked at a few people, I thank my dear friend Randor Guy for thinking of me and I wish you good luck. And he sat down. It was all over in 5 minutes. The lecture was supposed to go for three hours from 10 o'clock to 1 pm. By 10:15 the tea came before the tea boy could come at 11. It was all over. We had to run for the tea boy to bring it earlier. So that was, maybe it was a kind of a cynical approach he had. So that was his contribution in 'Paadhai Theriyudhu Paar'. Was Basu Menon involved in the production of this film?

[120 mins]

VG: No, he was not.

RG: He was nowhere in that picture?

VG: No, no.

RG: And then I find that you made 'Navarathri' which was A. P. Nagarajan's film?

VG: Yes, yes.

RG: And Sivaji played 9 roles. This 'Navarathri' was made by A. P. Nagarajan, one of the most successful Tamil filmmakers of recent years. He was an unusual film in the sense that Sivaji played 9 roles in one single film.

VG: Quite right.

RG: He appears in 9 different make-ups, set-ups and get-ups, or whatever you call it. What role did you play in that?

VG: I was in one episode where Sivaji Ganeshan appears as a leper. And I am supposed to have been educated by him. My father was helped by Sivaji, then this man comes to him, I sort of gratefully extend my help to Sivaji Ganeshan.

RG: Was it an adaptation of any stage play, because it had a very stagey look.

VG: A. P. Nagarajan always had stagey approach to his films.

RG: Because he came from the stage.

VG: That's right.

(Audio Breaks)

RG: We are talking of 'Navarathri'.

VG: 'Navarathri' when it was made and Nagarajan was sort of down and out.

RG: He had made films earlier than this?

VG: He had made you know this 'Naalvar', 'Town Bus'.

RG: 'Naalvar' was a stage play?

VG: Yes, a very famous play. About some four brothers, belong to different political parties and things like that. And he had worked with Mr. V. K. Ramaswamy and they

broke up. Yes, he was down and out. And he had wanted Sivaji Ganeshan. And when he was told he was going to play 9 roles, he was very interested. And Savitri was then you know a top star. And he wanted 10-15 minutes with her, and she first was very reluctant to meet him.

RG: Why?

VG: In the sense that you know she was not very sure of what Nagarajan will make. And then during tea time she gave some time. And when he narrated the story, she was so impressed. And he offered her Rs. 501 advance and he said that's all I can afford now. But she took just Re.1 and gave him back Rs. 500. And said I am willing to work in this picture. And I must say to her credit, that Sivaji Ganeshan, despite of his doing 9 roles in 9 different make-ups and get-ups and things like this, this woman was in the same saree and blouse, and encountered all those 9 characters. I think she came up as well as Sivaji Ganeshan in that film. In fact, one of the mistakes I did was that in Bombay, Tamil magazine, I said that there was only one actor called Sivaji Ganeshan who had done 9 roles in a film. I wrote to them saying Mr. Alec Guinness had played 9 roles in 'Kind Hearts and Coronets'. In which he had done something which Sivaji had not done in 'Navarathri', he played a dodgier woman.

RG: Of course, Sivaji was a little cut up about (Tamil dialogue) and all that.

VG: But this picture became a big success. It was released funnily enough on Deepawali Day with one other picture of Sivaji Ganeshan called 'Muradan Muthu'.

RG: Panthulu's Production.

VG: Panthulu's film. It was released on the same day. And there were quite a few times when Sivaji's pictures, more than one, was released on the same day. And this did very much. I don't think it was based on any foreign influence except that A. P. N. had these 9 emotions.

RG: 'Navarathri'.

VG: 'Navarathri'. And each emotion was a different character of Sivaji Ganeshan.

RG: A.P. Nagarajan, I wanted to ask you, he seems to have had a great love of Tamil classics?

VG: Yes, yes.

RG : Why I am asking you, I did not know him so well, a casual acquaintance, because I was not so much involved at that time. Recently we shot a Hindi serial. You may be interested to know, I did a role as a comical doctor in Hindi serial called Sahara, which is the Tamil version of (Tamil Title).

And the shooting of that was done in A. P. Nagarajan's house, that Sitamakalani Extension. And I was there for a couple of days, because the man who was making it, is Vasudeva, with whom we have all our TV work as you know. I was helping him in other aspects. And there was a number of books in the reception room which I believe was the study of A.P. Nagarajan and after his death it was all kept just like that.

VG : He had a very good library.

RG : At that time, I was picking up a lot of books which were all ancient Tamil classics. And some of them were totally new to me, they were all just names. And when I sat and read some of those pages, I found there was a lot of interesting story materials. In all those Sivapuranam, Kariyapuranam, Kandhapuranam. Maybe that's what gave him the inspiration and material for all those mythological stories which he did like 'Thiruvilaiyadal', 'Kandan Karunai'.

VG : I think he is unparalleled in this kind of like Cecil B. DeMille.

RG : Yeah, those kind of big productions.

VG : 'Thiruvilaiyadal', 'Kandan Karunai'.

RG : Interestingly I believe he used to play female roles.

VG : He was, on stage.

RG : On stage. Because I have still in a book with me, in which he plays the heroine along with T. K. T. K. Shanmugam. Both of them hugging each other.

VG : He was originally from T. K. S. brothers.

RG : T. K. S. brothers. I think that was 'Gumasthavin Penn'. And I believe M. V. Rajamma, who played that role later in the movie, when she was taken to see this play one version, she was totally unaware that the person was a male. And then she was introduced to him backstage. She said I am really taken aback as I thought it was a woman.

VG : Supposedly he had long hair. Ironically became very bald in later years.

RG : After this 'Navarathri' did you do any other films for Mr. Nagarajan?

VG : I did you know many films with him. I was in 'Kandan Karunai'. I was in many films, even in the later years. After he left Shivaji, he made some films like 'Thirumalai Thenkumari'. And then there was one film with circus as the background, small budget picture.

RG : 'Kankaatchi'.

VG : 'Kankaatchi'.

RG : This 'Thirumalai Thenkumari' was supposed to have been inspired by 'If it is Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium'.

VG : No, no, no.

RG : That's what I heard.

VG : This was just six religious resorts.

RG : And people going from place to place.

VG : Like Tirupati, Thiruttani, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Chamundeshwari Kovil and Guruvayur resorts. Bus load of people about 30 odd people. And there are the Tamilians, Telugus, Andhras and Malayalis.

RG : Did you see this film 'If it is Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium'.

VG : I saw that. That has nothing to do with it.

RG : Somebody told me that it was inspired.

VG : Nothing at all.

RG : The idea was.

VG : This was totally done to please the audiences in South India. And Sirkazhi Govindarajan was the Tamil Babu in that, K. D. Sandhanam. And our late comedian Suruli Rajan, he was given a major role in that. Manorama Sivakumar, A. Sakunthala. I played a Brahmin, a Purohit with Vasantha as my wife and two kids. This is just these

people going to these different places. On the way they have certain problems. And we are even, you know some robbers raid our bus near Madurai. That's all I mean.

RG: 'Navarathri' was a big success.

VG: 'Navarathri' was a very big success.

RG : And after that I see in you list another interesting film that was our S. Balachander's Bommai. It's an inspiration from Alfred Hitchcock.

VG: That's right.

RG: That was the first film you made with S. Balachander?

VG: You see S. Balachander I knew him from (indecipherable) school.

RG: What was he there?

VG: He was a student.

RG: Senior to you?

VG : 4 or 5 years my senior. Even then he was taking a large part in the school entertainment. He used to play tabla and all that. We used to be very good friends also. In fact, we used to go to a number of movies together in those days you know.

RG: But he was not an actor yet?

VG: He wasn't an actor yet.

RG: No but child roles I think he did it.

VG: Yes yes. He had you know this 'Seetha Kalyanam'.

RG: 'Seetha Kalyanam' he went along.

VG: Yeah, his sister was the.....

RG : His brother Rajam. Actually in 'Seetha Kalyanam' he made a very interesting contribution, so far as correcting the film history. You know the 'Seetha Kalyanam' was made at Kolhapur for Prabhat by Murugadasa, Ramnoth and Shekhar. All the

books, magazines and the one book on Tamil cinema, these are all the things I am trying to correct in my film which I am at work. K. Ramnath is credited as the cameraman. So, I asked him one day when I was chatting with him for a long time at one of our American Consulate parties. I asked him, were you there? He said I went along, the entire family was there. And I asked him about this Ramnoth sir because I am doing a book on Ramnoth as I told you. He said this is the popular misconception which has got into books, I have also heard. Actually, Ramnoth was only the still cameraman in that movie. You know Ramnoth started as a still photographer. He was in Kodak as an apprentice. And I asked him who was the cameraman. He said Ramnoth was actually trying to learn cinematography. And he was studying. He used to help the main cameraman. But he was not the cameraman, he was only the still photographer on 'Seetha Kalyanam'. Then he said I asked him who was the cameraman, do you remember. He said there was, Shantaram had a brother, he was the cameraman. And he said that he has forgotten the name of the cameraman. He was Avadhut. He said you know the name. Avadhut was the cameraman of 'Seetha Kalyanam' and Ramnoth was assisting him but he was only a still camera man at that time That's what he said. Coming back to 'Bomma'.

VG: I think it was the first picture I worked with Balchander, though we had known each other earlier. Then I did another film after that called 'Nadu Iravil'.

RG: That was Agatha Christie's Ten Little Indians.

VG: That's right. That had lot of release problems and had kept it for a while (Tamil dialogue). After completion he kept it for about 5 years.

RG: 5 years.

VG: 5 years.

RG: What went wrong with 'Nadu Iravil'?

VG: He won't sell it or people were not willing to buy it at his price. And then it was released and it did very well. 'Bomma' was again hundred days picture.

RG: 'Bomma' had a lot of new people.

VG: And even Yesudas probably sang for the first time in that film.

RG: Neeyum Bommai Naanum Bommai.

VG : That's right and I was the main role. I was a taxi driver in whose taxi this doll is planted. This Bommai is planted with the bomb.

RG : It was a bus in Hitchcock's film.

VG : Oh yeah it is a taxi.

RG : Here it is a taxi.

VG : I am a taxi driver and in which this doll is here. And you know suspense is there that when it will go off.

RG : When it explodes.

VG : Very interesting thing. I believe it was around '65.

RG : No it was much earlier, 'Bommai' was '64.

VG : 'Bommai' was released in Gaiety theatre. And a film called, Sridhar's film. S. V. Subbaiah, Muthuraman, Chandrakantha and myself.

RG : 'Kalai Kovil'.

VG : 'Kalai Kovil' was released in Casino.

RG : On the same day?

VG : On the same day.

RG : Theatres adjoining.

VG : Adjoining. I was in both the films. And the first show people walked out of 'Kalai Kovil'.

RG : Why? Too high brow?

VG : In the sense it was about a veena player. And when Subbaiah said dai dai dai, they started out. And this picture which we didn't expect much from, 'Bommai', did hundred days of business. A very interesting memory as far as these two pictures is concerned.

RG : I think you had a number of new faces as I was telling with us at that time. There used to be one Srinivasan who played a role in that. I used to know him in Mylapore. He plays tian I don't know what happened to him.

VG : Ramesh.

RG : Who was that petrol company.

VG : Died later on. A number of people.

RG : There were lot of new people coming into the field at that time.

VG : V. S. Raghavan was there. Maali. Sundarrajan was in 'Nadu Iravil'.

RG : Sundarrajan, V. S. Raghavan again. This 'Nadu Iravil' recently I saw it in theatre. It was quite interesting and it was very much appreciated. I rang Balachander and told him. He said I am very glad about people still think of those films as being good. And he said I am very glad that you thought I should be told.

VG : In fact, one interesting thing during shooting of 'Nadu Iravil' was, you know he always used to come in half shorts. Shirt and a hat one sometimes. One chandelier fell on his head.

RG : During the making of 'Nadu Iravil'. Where was this made, Vauhini studios?

VG : Vauhini Studios. You know Mr. Balchander being bald.

RG : Totally bald. Billiard ball.

VG : And he had a lot of cuts. But the way he disappeared, and he came back after half an hour with medicines, and things like that applied and continued shooting.

RG : I see. This Ten Little Indians, you know it is a very interesting story. This was made in the 40s in Hollywood. And I am sure you have seen that film. I saw it in 1975 at The American Consulate. Done by that French director René Clair and it was called 'And Then There Were None'. The film really stunned me. You know I rarely get stunned by movies. And I told Balachander about this 'And Then There Were None'. He said Randor Guy you remake Ten Little Indians today, you will get the same impact. I am telling you, you try it. I believe it was remade even in Hollywood by some foreign western producer. Because the other day somebody had a video cassette of this Ten Little Indians and it was not by René Clair. You know Denis O'Keefe played the main

role in the original version which we saw. Supposed to be one of the best. I don't know who remade it, I don't have any details. Now that was 'Bomma'. And I also remember I think you were involved in it. I was not seeing many movies in those days, I was totally away from movies. I was a stock broker trying to sell shares. I think Balachander did some kind of a gimmick. He brought in the artist to sell tickets for a particular show at Gaiety. Do you remember that?

VG: Yes we were all asked to sit in the theatre.

RG: The artists themselves will come and give you the tickets.

VG: I was not asked to do that.

RG: I see.

VG: Somehow, I don't know. But I think V. S. Raghavan.

RG: But I remember reading an ad of some kind of gimmick that was. Then you talked about this 'Kalai Kovil'. It's a musical by Sridhar.

VG: That was a film which was very beautiful. Good music. Vishwanathan was also a partner.

RG: I was about to tell you that because when Vishwanathan and I had done a lot of songs together. I wrote English songs for him. I have a monopoly of it as you know. One of the song sessions, he told us about 'Kalai Kovil'. This was Vishwanathan's story. There were two subjects of Sridhar which they wanted to make. One was 'Kalai Kovil', the other was 'Kaadhalikka Neramillai'. They said you choose either one. And if you want we will toss a coin and we will fix it. Then Vishwanathan said no, no, no, there is no point in tossing coins when our life is involved and our earnings are involved. 'Kalai Kovil' being a musical, I being a music director, I would rather do something which is after my own heart. That's how I chose 'Kalai Kovil' and I got involved in so much of debts. I am still paying those debts he said.

VG: In fact, the only applause in that film was for me where Muthuraman is already a married man going after some other woman. And in particular sequence I am with this woman he was chasing, garlanded.

RG: That was Rajasree.

VG : Rajasree. Then he will come to me and say now she is my wife, get out. A big applause, even in that failure of a film. I made a very good impression.

RG : In that role. That was 'Kalai Kovil'. And then this 'Kalangarai Vilakkam' you did afterwards I think again was a M. G. R. film.

VG : Yeah again it's a take off from Hitchcock.

RG : Vertigo.

VG : Vertigo. But that was all. I mean there you have said it. There was nothing much to it. It was not such a big success. It was ok. M. G. R. and Saroja Devi. Myself playing a very major role.

RG : What role did you play?

VG : I was a doctor and M. G. R. as a lawyer. We are good friends. And there was an incident when Saroja Devi was the highest paid star.

RG : At that time?

VG : About '65.

RG : 65,000 per film?

VG : 2.5 lakhs.

RG : 2.5 lakhs.

VG : First woman probably to ever get that amount was Saroja Devi in Tamil Nadu. And you know I had met her as an extra in a film in Kannada a long long ago in Mysore.

RG : She was known by some other name I think at that time.

VG : Or she had no name at all.

RG : So not Saroja Devi anyway.

VG : And where Jayalalitha's mother played the heroine. It was made by K. Subramanyam called 'Sreeratna'. Then later on she came to Madras, she did some dancing roles. Then she was introduced in this (indecipherable - Tamil Film) as

heroine. I mean I have known her you know right through. But by the time she was in (indecipherable - Tamil Film). Suddenly like as usual you feel they are indispensable. I was supposed to sort of feel her pulse you know as a doctor. And tell the people around what is her condition and all that. She said (Tamil dialogue).

RG: Again?

VG: Again. She repeats herself. And this Shankar and Thambhu.

RG: K. Shankar was the director, Thambhu was the cameraman.

VG: K. Shankar was the director, Thambhu was the cameraman. Sarathi was the still cameraman. So everybody didn't know what to do. So Mr. M. G. R. came. I was very friendly with M. G. R.. I could talk anything I liked. The last time I met him, I had no reservations, so I told him, sort of whispered saying (Tamil dialogue). He whispered back (Tamil dialogue). So when they said start, then I felt her pulse you know. Sort of looked at her, eyelids put my stethoscope, and took my own time, said my dialogue. The director is happy and he said cut. And the woman was fuming after the shot. And nothing could be done.

RG: This serial I told you, the TV serial. As you told me about taking your own time with a stethoscope. There is a similar sequence where I examine a lady patient. And this being a comical thing. And when I examine her chest or whatever it was. And she had, that dame was well stacked. And so my eyebrows and eyes do lot all kinds of dancing. And that was one of the highlight. Being a comedy of course, the character is called Dr. Chamatkar. Now I think 'Neerkumizhi', you did in '65.

VG: That's right.

RG: It was K. Balachander's first film. That was the beginning of his career.

VG: It was a play as usual. Earlier we had done it as Ragini Recreation's play. When I had started acting with them.

RG: You were in stage group also, Ragini Recreations?

VG: I was in several stage you know.

RG: S. V. Sahasranamam.

VG: Sahasranamam. And when I think Srikanth sort of had to go out of Madras, so they asked me to step in for him. And that is why.

(Audio Breaks)

RG: Started acting with them, Ragini Recreations. What was the first play you did?

VG: 'Major Chandrakanth' as the first son. And Mr. Balachander told me I had given new assertion to the character.

RG: What was that character?

VG: You know major is a blind man having two sons. I played the elder son.

RG: Who played it in the movie?

VG: Muthuraman I think.

RG: Muthuraman. Was it again inspired by a western play?

VG: Could be, I don't know.

RG: Because somebody told me, he is one who has very good knowledge of western theatre, that Major Chandrakanth was probably almost a verbatim, the production.

VG: It was originally done by Balachander for that Accountant General's annual competition.

RG: Based on a play by Emlyn Williams, you know that famous playwright of England.

VG: I know Emlyn Williams.

RG: This is what he told me. And this 'Neerkumizhi' again was kind of inspired by some kind of play.

VG: Yes it was.

RG: You remember the original?

VG: I don't, but I know that play. And major was done by Balachander himself. It was done in English first.

RG : He was working in the Accountant General's Office. Superintendent or something.

VG : And in that competition it got the first prize.

RG : In English, Major Chandrakanth.

VG : And then it was translated in Tamil and they used to go from.

RG : In English?

VG : In Tamil. Later on and it had, for the first time, about 6 men. No woman in the cast. And they played it for something like Rs. 200, Rs. 250. Even then people were not very anxious to see the play. I saw the play and I was immensely impressed with that play. And when I was asked to do this role, I most willingly did it. Enjoyed doing it. In fact, there is a newspaper thrown in that play. A postman or this newspaper vendor will come in a cycle and say "Sir, Paper". He will throw. And then Nagesh and myself used to do it, whenever we were not playing the main roles in this 'Major Chandrakanth'. We were so involved in that play.

RG : Was Nagesh in that play?

VG : Nagesh was not in that play.

RG : Was he active in films at that time?

VG : Sort of, beginning.

RG : Beginning of his career, I see.

VG : And then of course Ragini Recreations used Nagesh as their main prop for many of their plays after.

RG : He became famous.

VG : He was instrumental in, in fact in 'Major Chandrakanth' being filmed by AVM. Nagesh brought it about and he introduced Balachander to Avichi Chettiar. And you know there were little hesitations and things like that, but then he made it.

RG : And when you told me about this English version of 'Major Chandrakanth', Major Sundarrajan had played him in English version. And everytime we meet he talks of making it in English.

VG : In fact there was a chap called Hari Krishnan who was in the PMG's office who was one of our very prominent actors in stage mainly with Ragini Recreations later on. He was asked to do this Major Chandrakant's role. And he refused it.

RG : Then only Sundarrajan came.

VG : And Sundarrajan to his luck, he got that role and he made a name. He is still called Major.

RG : Major Sundarrajan.

VG : Inspite of 4 or 5 films. Anyway, that picture was made shoestring budget, I think it was about.

RG : 'Neerkumizhi'

VG : 3 Lacs. Total cost.

RG : 'Neerkumizhi'. Who was the producer for 'Neerkumizhi'?

VG : Producer was some man coupled with A. K. Velan of Arunachalam Studios and Nimoy Ghosh, the cameraman and Kumar the music director for the stage.

RG : V. Kumar, who was with him on stage.

VG : Who was the man who did music for this film, and a couple of later films also like 'Naanal' and something else. Then it was Balachander, switched on to.

RG : One of his complaints.

VG : And that was a time when Arunachalam Studios did not have a phone.

(Audio breaks)

RG : This 'Neerkumizhi', I think Sowcar Janaki is also in the play, she plays a lady doctor. Was she on the play?

VG: Yes, yes she was. I am the footballer who gets his leg amputated.

RG: I saw it in one of the reruns.

VG: And Nagesh plays the cancer patient. And we three did the same roles in the film, where the role which Hari Krishnan did it on the stage, Major did it on the screen. Deepawali '65 it was released.

RG: I saw it sometime late '65. I still remember one particular shot or sequence when you bike your knees and Janaki pulls your hand of mouth.

VG: It was a very successful play. And within two months, before '65 end, the second picture was released that was 'Naanal'. That was desperate hours. It was done very well on stage. In fact, the stage was divided into two halves. One was the house, one was the police station. And when the curtain was there, the police station would also become part of the house. Vice-versa, the house would also become full. It was something never before done.

RG: Something new on stagecraft.

VG: Yes. In 'Neerkumizhi' also there was an anti-room of the doctor, you know which get decked to the stage. Ranganath.

RG: I know Ranganath.

VG: Was the art director of Ragini Recreations. Did some marvelous things with 'Neerkumizhi', 'Naanal'. Later on, with 'Ethir Neechal', and all those plays. He had done some marvelous things, which have never been done before on stage. After 'Neerkumizhi' and 'Naanal', Balachander never looked back. He probably has done about what now, about 80 films they say in Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Kannada, all that. He is a Padma Shree.

RG: A force in Tamil Cinema.

VG: And he is a producer, a very big producer now.

RG: Now he is a typical.

VG: Not only directs but produces also.

RG : This, then I think one of the important films people talk about with you is that 'Nenjirukkum Varai'. Tell us something about that was produced by, directed by Sridhar.

VG : Chitralaya.

RG : Chitralaya Production.

VG : And produced and directed by Sridhar. Written by him.

RG : Written by him. Was it again based on something else?

VG : It was based on a Bengali play.

RG : Bengali play was it.

VG : That's right.

RG : I see.

VG : Called 'Hunger'.

RG : Bought rights for it.

VG : I am not sure of. Supposed to have been based on a Bengali play. And these three characters were there in the original. Sivaji Ganeshan.

RG : Who played that Christian youth, Peter or somebody?

VG : Yes, Peter. Muthuraman and Sivaji Ganeshan. Vijaya in the leading role. V. S. Raghavan as Vijaya's father. But then what happened was, I think I have talked about this earlier. About the interval time, you know the distributors confused Sridhar.

RG : And they wanted things, 'Masala', box office stuff.

VG : Latter half was changed and latter half was not good as the first half. But that was a film we did without make-up. Even as early as '66. Released in '67.

RG : Did you do any sequence in that, on the beach road?

VG : That's right, there was a song sequence.

RG : What am I asking you is, those days, as I told you, I was a stock broking executive, and I was living in Mylapore. And my office was in first line, second line beach in Georgetown. I used to drive down in the morning, and one morning I think I saw you, Mali, Sivaji Ganeshan doing some.

[150 mins]

VG : That was a song sequence.

RG : I was just passing by.

VG : Nenjirukkum Engalukku like that. Very popular song. And the beauty of that song was. It starts somewhere around the other end of the beach. Somewhere now where is Anna Samadhi. And the artists and camera, they are always on the move. There is not one static shot in the entire song sequence. I unfortunately was bare footed. Both Muthuraman and Sivaji Ganeshan were careful enough to wear slippers. And after about one and a half days in that tar road, my feet were all full of blisters for about a week. But it was worth it because I got a good name in that sequence.

RG : That was a very interesting film that you did. It was recently shown on TV and I saw this. As you said, after you die in the film, interest was lost.

VG : It should have been a classic, if they had stuck to original.

RG : And that was 'Nenjirukkum Varai'. 'Neerkumizhi', (indecipherable - Tamil Title). I don't know what kind of film was that. This 'Galatta Kalyanam' was Rajendran's earlier film.

VG : One of his early movies. It was a play again.

RG : Play, was it?

VG : Which we did, Sivaji Ganeshan and all of us artists. We did it in 6 state capitals like Madurai, Coimbatore, Salem.

RG : For some....

VG : Yeah, we went for collections. And then it was into a film. I was responsible for Sivaji fixing Rajendran as a director. They were not very keen on Rajendran.

RG : Because he was a novice.

VG : That's right. And they knew him only as a trolley pusher, you see with Sridhar.

RG : He is related to Sridhar.

VG : He is a cousin of Sridhar. He was always working on the sets of Sridhar, pushing trolleys. And Gopu was accepted as a writer of the film, who had written the dialogues for the play also. And I said after all you know Rajendran deserved the position. It became a big success.

RG : Rajendran also studied in Pachaiyappa's College.

VG : And it was the first film which starred Jayalalitha and Sivaji Ganeshan together. From her earlier films, Kannada films, Sridhar's picture, 'Vennira Aadai'. Then M. G. R.'s 'Ayirathil Oruvan'. After all that the first film she did was this 'Galatta Kalyanam' with Sivaji.

RG : Was it a big success?

VG : Very big success. 100 days.

RG : Because of it being a comedy or?

VG : It was a good comedy. And people liked it.

RG : And this 'Kaaval Dheivam' is another film that I think was slightly offbeat kind of film by S. V. Subbaiah, written by Jayakanthan.

VG : It was incidentally our Vijayan whom we talked about earlier in 'Paadhai Theriyudhu Paar'. It was his first directorial debut.

RG : He became a director in that film.

VG : He became a director in that film.

RG : Was the story of a jailer who allows somebody to go on parole.

VG : That's right.

RG : Whether he will come back or not.

VG : Sivaji plays this...

RG : Convict. Tree climber.

VG : And Sowcar Janeki was in that film. I played a jailor in that film.

RG : What was S. V. Subbaiah, was he not Chief of the jailor?

VG : He was the jail superintendent.

RG : Jail superintendent. Written by Jayakanthan.

VG : It was a good success those days.

RG : It was one of those offbeat, slightly offbeat.

VG : Yes even for those days. Sivakumar has done a small role in the film.

RG : Maybe that was one of his very early films. Because I remember that 'Kaaval Dheivam' very well. Then 'Vietnam Veedu' again I think was a very successful play of Sivaji Ganeshan.

VG : Very successful play where I played, not a very major part. I am kind of a clerk in a firm, corrupt. Trying to corrupt the other men.

RG : It was made in a movie later on. Did you play in the movie?

VG : I was in the movie. I was not in the play.

RG : You were not in the play, only the movie version.

VG : Only I was there when the play was being rehearsed. And right through the play I was with Mr. Sivaji Ganesan.

RG : That was his own stage production.

VG : (indecipherable - Namandragman) in fact the first night, I used to be on the sidewings. And cue him for his English dialogues.

RG : There were a lot of English dialogues.

VG : Yeah. For instance, you know, “Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you what you are.” That’s the dialogue there. I will say this and then he will repeat it.

RG : You were prompting the line.

VG : I was prompting the line.

RG : How did you manage it on stage?

VG : You know professional actors have a knack of doing it without.

RG : Being hurt.

VG : And the last ten lines in the play were written by me actually.

RG : In English?

VG : No in Tamil.

RG : In Tamil.

VG : Yes, yes. After he regains his job, he talks the mother’s portrait. About 10-15 lines. And they were written by me. I was there throughout with him (Indecipherable - Shanguman), his late younger brother thought that play will flop. And he said why is this man wasting a lot of his time straining himself. But that gave a new dimension to Sivaji. People liked to see him as that Padmanabhan, prestige Padmanabhan.

RG : I think it also gave a break to Vietnam Veedu Sundaram, the writer.

VG : That’s right. There were a couple of faults in that play. Like you know this man, this prestige Padmanabhan is told by his English Boss, that you are retiring from now. 4 o’clock he will come and say that you are retiring. And Sivaji will get shocked. Then he comes home and says Savitri (Tamil dialogue). He will cry. So even when the film was made, I told him of this error. I told him sir.

RG : P. Madhavan directed.

VG : Yeah, any executive knows when he is going to retire. And he plans his retirement. He says I will go to Bangalore, buy a bungalow or this and that (Tamil dialogue). It was even put in the film. Couple of errors.

RG : That always happen in most of the movies. People still like in spite of those errors. And this 'Nalla Neram' was again an M. G. R. film. That was a Devar Production.

VG : Yes, Devar Production. It was a huge big success.

RG : It had an elephant in it, and M. G. R. plays an elephant trainer or something like that.

VG : He plays a circus man. I play his teacher, you know who teaches him diving into the fire, for about 200-300 feet. So again, when the film was made again in Hindi, David played my role.

RG : David the famous character actor who now lives in Canada.

VG : He is no more now.

RG : Oh he died recently. He had moved to Canada.

VG : That's right. And he was a one-legged man, the character. He is the mentor of M. G. R. in that film. Did very well.

RG : By the time I think M. G. R. was a superstar.

VG : Oh yes, a very big superstar. In fact, I think 'Nalla Neram' was probably his last picture with Devar. After that they didn't make any movies.

RG : He has done lot of films with 'Chinnappa Devar'. Most of them were quite successful. You see 'Thaai Sollai Thattadhe', 'Thayai Katha Thanayan', 'Vettaikaaran'.

VG : Everyone of them.

RG : Everyone of them. Do you think there is any special reason? It can't be just luck. Any particular reason why that team clicked so well. You were so close to them.

VG : I don't know how you can explain success or failure.

RG : Nothing succeeds like success.

VG : But the man was a phenomenon.

RG : M. G. R..

VG : Devar.

RG : Devar himself.

VG : Oh yes.

RG : In what way?

VG : He had a huge big memory, you know. And he exactly knew what he wanted to show on the screen. Like for instance I am going to do a murder. He will say (Tamil dialogue). Then with the scene with dagger, the audience knows exactly why he is there. So nothing is left to imagination. So he is just (Tamil dilogue). And whatever he did was a success.

RG : You know he had that Midas touch.

VG : I had a lot of association with him. And he had a lot of respect for me. In fact, he used to ask me (Tamil dialogue).

RG : He was supposed to be an illiterate himself. I have heard a lot of things about him.

VG : In fact, I don't think he never even knew the existence of The Hindu or the reviews in The Hindu and things like that.

RG : I see, never bothered.

VG : Not bothered, it didn't matter to him. He was not interested.

RG : What was the role of Thirumugam, who was directing his pictures, his younger brother, the editor-director.

VG : Thirumugam originally as you know started as an editor's assistant.

RG : In Jupiter.

VG : And when Devar became a producer, he naturally brought his brother. But everything was done under Devar's instructions. Telling what exactly to be taken out and taken. Type of Hollywood producer again.

RG : He controlled every aspect.

VG : Every aspect. And he was a man who was a stickler for work. Hard work. 9 means 9 o'clock everything must start. In fact, he even told Hindi artists like Rajesh Khanna and Sashi Kapoor and everybody, 9 o'clock means 9 o'clock we should be here. Devar pays money. So, you better be there, in his own broken English. They were all there on time. They respected him. They came and he produced some hits in Hindi.

RG : 'Haathi Mere Saathi' films like that. Very successful films. He was another very interesting character in Indian Cinema.

VG : Very interesting.

RG : Who needs to be recognized.

VG : He used to go bare bodied even to Bombay with sandanam on his body.

RG : I have seen him like that.

VG : Bundled up money. Suppose a man wanted ten lakhs, ten lakhs was paid in cash in a bundle. You know on the table. And there were no qualms about that. They were reporting on time and completing his picture.

RG : This 'Kurathi Magan' which you did in 1972, I see from your list, was by K. S. Gopalakrishnan.

VG : That's right.

RG : He was again from the stage, was he?

VG : Oh yes very much from (indecipherable - navajmani).

RG : Because all his films are like photographed staged plays.

VG : He is basically a stage man.

RG : Everybody talks all the time.

VG : He knew that he wouldn't succeed as an actor.

RG : Was he an actor first?

VG: He started as an actor.

RG: In movies?

VG: Not in the movies. On the stage. Then he switched to writing, he wrote songs for films earlier. And then he started writing scripts. Started directing, producing.

RG: Built a studio too. At one time he was very successful.

VG: As a director 'Karpagam' shot into fame. Then he had many successful movies, 'Panama Pasama'

RG: Yeah, it was a very big success of his.

VG: And he made some pictures like A. P. Nagarajan also like 'Aathi Parasakthi'.

RG: Those things were not very successful.

VG: No one or two of them did well. One picture where Subbhiah plays a main role was a big success.

RG: He also tried something in Hindi, but he was not very successful.

VG: He did 'Karpagam' in Hindi. They got Guru Dutt here to play in Hindi version. He has done about at least half a dozen Hindi movies.

RG: I don't think he was.....

VG: I don't think so. Not many succeeded in Hindi Movies...

RG: May be because he was basically a dialogue-oriented man.

VG: Basically, yes.

RG: In Hindi it is totally different. And incidentally his son Venkatesh studied at the institute. He was the cameraman for that Hindi TV serial in which I told you I did it.

VG: Oh yes.

RG: Venkatesh also did this (indecipherable Kaputikasaram)

VG: Yeah he is in TV...

RG: He directed. That was Karatimalan. I think 'Thava Pudhalvan' was again our Muktha Srinivasan.

VG: About a man who has got night blindness.

RG: That was the film in which I was supposed to have become immortal, that English song.

VG: I played Sivaji's father or Vijaya's father. I played father to everybody including M. G. R..

RG: That song, 'Love is fine'. I actually remember Muktha Srinivasan telling me. He said, "Look Randor Guy. This 'Love is fine darling when you are man' has become a big hit. You have become immortal, you can safely die." I said I am too young to think of it. But that was a big success you know that film and the song too. Though I don't think it was much of a song.

VG: was very interesting to me.

RG: In what way?

VG: Somehow Sivaji and I broke up.

RG: What brought about it?

VG: Nothing concrete.

RG: How many films do you think you would have done with Sivaji Ganeshan.

VG: I don't know. 20-30.

RG: 20-30 films.

VG: But from '72 to '82, I have not done a film with Sivaji Ganeshan. 10 years. Then in '82 it was Balaji who bought us together again.

RG: What film was that?

VG: I think it was some 'Theerpu'.

RG: Were there any personal reasons for it or just one of those things?

VG: One of those kinks in my brain. I thought this man is not helping me and why I should see him. I suddenly stopped seeing him. And 10 years I didn't see him.

RG: You never saw him at all?

VG: I never saw him at all. Not even accidentally. Whenever he was in the studio, I probably walked out and go away. And in '82 it was Balaji brought us together in Balaji Productions. He said Gopi is doing this role. The man charitably, you know, did not object. And the first scene was that he should kill me with a bottle.

RG: In 'Theerpu'?

VG: In 'Theerpu'. He had to break it on my head and with half the bottle, he pierced in my stomach. And he refused to do it. He said supposing something happened, they will say that we have been not acting for ten years, and I have taken it out on Gopi. So, I won't do this. And Balaji had to demonstrate to Sivaji. It was a collapsible bottle. It was an American thing. Even if you put it the minimum force on a table, it breaks. Then he demonstrated with 2 or 3 bottles (Tamil dialogue). Then you know some tomato juice and some red stuff was put into that bottle.

RG: Resembles blood.

VG: And he hits on my head. You know the sequence is Sudarshan.

RG: The villain, Kannada actor. Nagendra Rao.

VG: He sort of rapes Sivaji Ganeshan's daughter.

RG: I see.

VG: And I am kind of a stooge to Sudarshan. And he asked me to remove that girl from that place to some room. So, as I am lifting that girl, Sivaji Ganeshan enters. And he thinks that I have done this to this girl. And he sort of you know in moment of anger, he kills me.

RG: Who plays that girl?

VG : A little girl called Nitya. A small girl about 14-15. And you know that got a lot of sympathy. You know Sudarshan, a huge hulk of a man, raped a girl like that. That was you know people loved it.

RG : That was the girl who did a kissing sequence in Malayalam.

VG : Oh yes.

RG : Created a big sensation. I think she is out of films now.

VG : Must have been good at it.

RG : 'Ulagam Sutrum Valiban' again for M. G. R.. That was in '73.

VG : Magnum Opus.

RG : Which he shot in Japan.

VG : In Japan Expo 70.

RG : Did you go to Japan?

VG : I didn't, I didn't.

RG : You had only sequences here.

VG : All our sequences were shot here in Satya Studios.

RG : That was again directed by M. G. R..

VG : Totally.

RG : Was it a big success?

VG : Super hit.

RG : 'Ulagam Sutrum Valiban'

VG : Super hit.

RG : Very big.

VG: Even today.

RG: Yes, it collects a lot of money.

VG: And I had to learn skating in that film. And Manjula, Lata, myself used to report at Satya Studios, every morning at 6 o'clock. And then we fell and fell and then. I was a good skater by the time shooting started. And M. G. R. was also again supposed to be on skates. And I am supposed to kill him by putting a needle into him you know. That's the climax in the film. So everyday they used to say M. G. R. will come, M. G. R. will come. But never did he turn up. On the day of the shooting, he was there.

RG: He was politically busy at that time.

VG: Always was busy. And this was the time when he was thrown out of the party.

RG: Starting his own Anna DMK.

VG: And this was released under great circumstances. You know under great difficulties. Not even a poster was there in the city.

RG: What went wrong?

VG: Karunanidhi saw to it that the release was made difficult. And he shot this final sequence with me on skates. If you see the film today, you will believe that M. G. R. was on skates. But he was never on skates. You know the camera was manipulated, he was manipulated.

RG: He always did that.

VG: And about 6 months, 1 year after the film was released, that time I was touring Tamil Nadu for stage plays. Everywhere I used to have trouble with the public (Tamil dialogue).

RG: Angry at you.

VG: Very angry with me. I had to finally convince them it was M. G. R. who asked me to do it. It was his instruction and it was you know he was the director. I was asked to do it (Tamil dialogue).

RG : Love they had for him. And the skating, did you have an ice rink or something like that.

VG : No, no. It was on floor. It was actually shot during summer, when there was a power shut down. And we were about 200-300 people including foreigners. In the sequence. And it was generators. It was costing him hell of a lot. And he used to feed these people like hell.

RG : He was a great one for feeding people.

VG : Oh yes. And all the extras, bit part players. They will get very good food you know like Pulao and things like that.

RG : Where did he get all these foreigners to participate in that?

VG : People were there, you know, passing by. And there are people available in hostels, and things like that. Here at least 50-60 foreigners. For 3 days. They were there from morning till night. And we will never know when it will end at night. It used to go on and on.

RG : One thing I wanted to ask you this something which I have seen myself in his films by analyzing them. Even though he is supposed to be an expert stuntman, according to people. You know the public image is totally different from what he wants. It happens to any actor. That he was very scared of doing stunts, he was not prepared to take risks.

VG : No, no I will not subscribe to this view. Because in 'Malaikallan' he has himself done all his stunts in his early days. And in fact, this N. T. Rama Rao who played hero in the Telugu version.

RG : 'Malaikallan' was made in Telugu simultaneously.

VG : Simultaneously. With Bhanumathi in same role. And this cameraman Sailen Bose who was not happy with N. T. Rama Rao doing some stunts. He used to say this is no good man, ask the tamil man to do it again. So, M. G. R. has done stunts for N. T. Rama Rao. Doubled for N. T. R. in the Telugu version. But what happened was as he grew in the industry and as he started to know the nuances of a fight sequence, he did not want to take undue risk. That's why he was careful. I mean you know he will manipulate the camera, the movements of the artist so well that no one will get hurt. That's All. But not that he was scared of doing anything.

RG : I will tell you why I asked this question. See one of his later films which comes on tv as a song sequence. I think once you told me about that when you were shooting a tv serial. There is a lengthy song on which he and another friend of his. I don't know where he's from, 'Nadodi Mannan'. They go on a horse singing through the countryside. The song lasts for nearly five or six minutes and most of these songs do. And in that when you see it very carefully, you know very easily, especially people like us who know the technique of filmmaking, that not even in a single frame M. G. R. was there.

VG : That's not because he was afraid of horse.

RG : Why I am asking you this is, afraid or not, T. Prakash Rao directed his 'Padagotti' and which was a very big success as you know. Were you in 'Padagotti'?

VG : No, I was not.

RG : That was made by Velumani. And when Prakash Rao and I when were doing 'Engalalum Mudiyum' together, he used to tell me a lot of his experiences during breaks. And we used to shoot in all sorts of odd outlying places which involved a lot of travelling. And he used to come out with lots of stories because he knew that I was also a film historian who probably will be writing about all this someday. He said when he did 'Padagotti', he had thought of certain shots showing M. G. R. swing because he was a fisherman. The fisherman naturally swims like probably like next to the next best fish, having sequences of showing him swimming around. He thought it will add to his macho image as the he-man of the South Indian screen. But M. G. R was totally against his doing any sequences. And for the sheer fun of it, he had set up one shot and somehow, he was able to induce

M. G. R. to do that shot and they were ready to take it. By the time one huge wave came to the shore. And the man ran for his life and said I don't want to take all these risks you are shooting my

blood pressure or something. He made it very dramatic when he narrated it to me in the running car

That's why I asked you whether he was scared later because of the risk involved.

VG : He was never scared of doing anything. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he could do anything he wanted. But he thought why waste. And he was very careful, even when

he was fighting with Nambiar or P. S. Virapa or Manohar any body, you'll see that they don't get hurt. He doesn't get hurt by them by the way he composes the shot and most of it is done very skilfully. In fact, this sequence where he's supposed to fight with the lion, he and the lion never met.

RG : I know, you can see that when you see the shots

VG : But then the people you know they really took it that he was fighting a lion and that's intelligence.

RG : He was a very good technician because I've done a couple of films with him. I knew that he had he had very good knowledge of technique even in 'Nalla Neram', I could see his you know suggesting Thirumugam how the shots should be taken like.

VG : Yeah, the man knew what he was doing.

RG : Yeah especially I could quite understand his experience of feature filmmaking, you know that there was a documentary produced by the Tamil Nadu state government for the World Tamil Conference in Madurai. It was called 'Kumari Kandam'. I did the English version of it, it was done in two languages. The Tamil version was done by Nilakanthan, and the English version I did it. And at that time M.G.R. used to come there to the Gemini outfit, at about two in the morning and see the shots and suggest corrections, and Nilakanthan was very scared of this man's comment so he used to make sure that he was the only man around , at 2 am is an odd hour for me to be around anyways, and the next morning he will communicate what M. G. R. said. And one or two interesting points for which Nilakanthan had different views, you know he had no background in Documentary filmmaking whereas I had you know, I started as a documentary filmmaker, I still do a lot of documentaries and he wouldn't agree and later in the morning he would say M. G. R. (Tamil dialogue). He used to tell me. And in one sequence where you know, where we were having some problems, he actually suggested to Nilkanthan to tell me that the required effect could be had by under-cranking the shot which I didn't even myself think, in spite of my being a technician and I was really surprised, really pleasantly and I asked him (Tamil dialogue). And we did it, we got the technique, that's why I used to admire the man as a very brilliant technician.

VG : In fact, in 'Ulagam Sutrum Valiban', he had enough material for a part two, it was so much, but he was a merciless editor. I could see that when we went and got this one part which was a huge big success, even if he had released part number two, it would have been a success. yes so much material.

RG : Later when he had a documentary to be made about the visit of some UNESCO officials you know, he particularly said that it should be done by me and he did it for him. It's a film called 'Visit to Remember' which he liked very much. So, I knew that which made me think that he was an

expert technician who knew almost all the nuances of filmmaking.

VG: No doubt about it.

RG : Whether it was a feature film or a documentary film. See many feature filmmakers don't even bother about documentaries. Whereas here was the man who knew everything yes and what the camera could do and as you said you know he will show what exactly people wanted to see. I think that was that is why I used to admire the man such a lot.

(Audio Breaks)

RG: I think we were talking about 'Suryagandhi' when we finished last.

VG : Yeah that was the film by Muktha Srinivasan with Muthuraman and yes Jayalalithaa.

RG: What was the role you played in that?

VG: I played Jayalalithaa's boss in an office.

RG: Yeah, that's right. I remember. Yeah, I wrote a song for this.

VG: Yes, they shot it in that Pond's company.

RG: Ponds was it?

VG : Yeah on a Sunday, and it was a holiday and my character was very much like public.

RG: I saw the film recently when it went on TV and it was a big success. A small budget film.

VG: And Periyar E. V. Ramasamy was asked to give the shield on 100th day. I still have the shield.

RG : I had something to do that. You have the invitation with you, peculiarly odd invitation, which I drafted for Srinivasan. I was in Bangalore at that time, I had a shield which he is still keeping with him. And I think it was the Screen, I remember about the (indecipherable) business which I drafted for Srinivasan. He said the Screen wrote a review of that function which Srinivasan read out to me later over the phone. He said,

it was like any other film and function. There was only one thing which was something out of the ordinary that was the invitation. 'Netru Indru Naalai', again in 1974 was M. G. R.'s film. It was more a political film, wasn't it?

VG: No, No.

RG: That's what I heard. I have not seen it.

VG: It had trouble getting released, that's all.

RG: From censor?

VG: There are no politics in the film at all. He has three women in that film and Rajasree was one. It was made by Ashokan.

RG: I know, why I am asking you this, 'Netru Indru Naalai', Ashokan wanted to copy in Telugu and we had a common friend, a chap called (indecipherable - Amridilangam), who used to work for M. G. R.. He was his manager or something.

VG: Yeah, I know him.

RG: (indecipherable - Amridilangam), is a very close friend of mine. So, he brought that project to me. He said why don't we do it, and we did start work on it. Ashokan was very happy and then suddenly we were told that in the agreement with M. G. R. there was a clause that you can't even dub a film unless he gives his consent. He writes such a clause and on that he said (Tamil dialoue) project never took off. Then (indecipherable - Amridilangam) went and asked M. G. R. that we are worked with him, little bit of opportunity, little bit of money thanks to Randor or something.

VG: So, he supposed to have said (indecipherable - Amridilangam) started as a producer, Sivaji Ganesan, Vyjayanthimala. It was shot about 5 - 6 thousand feet without these two and they are only fit enough to be sold as bags. It was I who introduced him to M. G. R.. I wanted somebody to teach him English. In fact, I got a lot of work for him through G. S. Gopalakrishnan.

RG: That's how I came to know.

VG: He was so well to do man, I knew him when he was a producer. And it was I who took a personal

interest in him. Introduced him to G. S. U. I. S. and M. G. R.. He will do some translating work, get some money.

RG: I was doing some scripts for Voice of America

VG: But nothing political probably. It was just a mere you know an ordinary story like any M. G. R. story where I played his foster father. I find M. G. R. as a child then I sort of am responsible for his growing up and he becomes M. G. R. later. Nothing politically.

[180 mins]

RG: But it was a big success.

VG: Big success. Good songs. Songs were very popular.

RG: 'Naalai Namadhe' again was M. G. R..

VG: Yeah Sethumadhavan film.

RG: Again, that was the remake of Shantaram's film.

VG: No, it was Dharmendra film, which was 'Yadoon Ki Baarat'.

RG: But he also remade Shantaram.

VG: That was later on. 'Pallandu Vazhga'. Remake of 'Do Ankhen Barah Hath'. With Shantaram's role played by M. G. R. Jail warden. 6 convicts. 'Naalai Namadhe' was a big flop. M. G. R. played two roles, which were played with different people on the screen in the Hindi version. Maybe Saito made some money in that film, which was not a big success. I again played a character part a good Part. I'm a young man, then I grow old and I have the beard and things like that. It was a good role in 'Naalai Namadhe'.

RG: This 'Raja Nagam' was Puttana's 'Naagarahaavu' remade in Tamil.

VG: That's right. It was remade in Tamil with a lot of hullabaloo and muhurat. The pressure was in the children's theater with Puttana himself there. But it flopped you know. Bombed like hell, even in Telugu. It was a flop in Hindi. In Kannada it was huge.

RG: Kannada version ran for a year.

VG : I saw the Kannada version. Ashwath played a very good role. He is a great actor, very very fine character actor in this country. I rate him, (indecipherable - Humri) in Telugu, Adoor Bhasi in Malayalam, Chhabi Biswas in Bengali, very fine actors.

RG : 'Raja Nagam' was a miserable flop in Tamil I think. I saw it in Bangalore.

VG : N. S. Manian did not recover the money, I don't know.

RG : Was he the producer?

VG : N. S. Manian who got the rights from Puttanna. He produced and directed it.

RG : What happened sometimes these remakes...

VG : Like Balan made that famous Kannada film (indecipherable - Kannada Title). Made in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi, all flop.

RG : 'Idhayakkani' again was M. G. R. film was made by R. M. Veerappan. I did a song in English, which Usha Utthup, Tanuja in main role. Most of it shot in Bangalore. That was very big success

VG : And Balkrishnan's camera was great.

RG : Especially the opening sequence where they show the Kaveri, where it was born and how it comes. Like they had a song also. Yes, they spent a lot of money on making it. Veerappan never spared money or pains because why I remember this Kaveri river sequences, a couple of years back. Mr. Lakshman of Sirini films, Bangalore he was involved in all his filmland politics I think he's vice president of our South Indian Chamber. He's a very good friend of mine, I've done some work for him he came and asked me that Ram Krishna Hekte wanted a film to be made on the river Kaveri as a kind of a public relations exercise, yeah for both the states to show that Karnataka is not against Tamil Naidu, sharing the Kaveri water. I thought as a documentary film maker. He had a script written by T. S. Narsimhan, who made Malguddi Days. And the time I told Laxman, who took me to Bangalore, I said if you want for Kaveri, just buy that opening reel from Mr. Veerappan. He was very happy.

VG : I remember when I was shooting your song in hotel in Bangalore. There was a flower vase which they wanted, the cameraman wanted for some artistic beauty. And the hotel people said it will cost them some 400 500 rupees just to use that flower vase.

And M. G. R. said, I mean Veerappan said get it, whatever it costs and M. G. R. said (Tamil Dialogue).

RG : Who said, M. G. R.?

VG : M. G. R. said to Veerappan (Tamil Dialogue). In fact, there was a room, suite for M. G. R. in Ashoka hotel. In fact, a scene was shot in balcony of that room. No cost was spared. Veerappan did a magnificent job, he is fine producer, he is excellent producer. I have number of films with him. In fact, in Bangalore, M. G. R. and some other used to be in some hotels, and Raj Sulochna some other hotel. Me and director in some other hotel. And Veerappan with one Virannan, you know main assistant to Veerappan, sit under the phone at 4 o'clock in the morning and organize which car will go and bring who and where, you know. We'll start work around 7 o'clock. A great organizer.

RG : Yeah, he's a very good administrator. I think that's why he was so successful in this.

VG : And everything he does. 'Unarchigal' ...

RG : That movie introduced Sakthi and Kamal Haasan.

VG : Yeah it was something very courageous you know. It was about a boy who contracted venereal disease. Kamal plays a boy from Param Kudi.

RG : Who seduces everybody and everywhere.

VG : And the attachment to a prostitute, played by Srividya very beautifully, to this boy and he has an eye on her because you know everybody has said that this is a woman anybody wants and things like that and the way he stores liquor and he saves money to attain her and all she wants is his affection as a brother. Beautiful film. I played a marvellous role as a sports lover and whose wife goes astray because the husband is away from home. She goes to bed with my own manager. There's a beautiful scene, never done before or after that. Where I, with a friend of mine, played by Ramdas, with the woman, that's my wife and the man who has cuckolded me. That's a beautiful scene when I tell her that go away from this house but take everything you want. Come back whenever you think that you can live with me. Such a beautiful scene.

RG : Sakthi's first film.

VG : Sakthi's first film as writer director.

RG : And Kamal Hassan told me that he also worked as an assistant director in that film.

VG : Also yes. They were both assistants to Thangappan, dance master, who directed that Christian film 'Annai Velankanni'. In which both Kamal and Sakthi were working. In fact, it was Kamal who brought Sakthi to me and introduced me. Sir we have a role for you and you should play this role. The first night we were shooting in a bank officer's house in Adiyar and that was the inauguration of my play. A very successful play (indecipherable - title). At 10:30 - 11, I start shooting with Sakthi, after the play. And you know when I do a play I revise it thoroughly and I work at it for about two months and my wife said should you go tonight, I mean after all you're not going to play and why not do some other things. I said oh no I'll go on our work. That day started with little friction between Sakthi and I.

RG : Why?

VG : I found that some lines were unnecessary. He said very politely, he said, no Sir it has to be done this way. And those dialogues brought me applause in the theatre. It ran 100 days. And till today Sakthi is very close to me and I mean all his efforts and one of my very good roles recently was 'Sirai'.

RG : This 'Unarchigal' was made by Bose (producer) or Subhash Chandra Bose or whatever he calls himself. Supposed to be a student leader or something. This film when it went for censoring it was totally rejected. They refused a certificate and because they thought it was vulgar and such a film should not be allowed at all. That was the view of the officer and this Subhash Chandra Bose and I have a common auditor. A chap called Silva Raja. He is a good friend of his. And Silva Raja gave him an idea that the producer should submit a memorandum to the censor board again explaining what the film is really about. It is supposed to have meanings at various levels, as we talk about films sometimes. And Subhash Chandra Bose came to me.

VG : His name is just not Subhash Chandra Bose. He is just Bose.

RG : I know. We used to call him Subhash Chandra Bose. I wrote a nine page memorandum which was typed in his auditor's office. And based on that, a re-censoring of the film was made where everybody on the panel of censors who happened to be of the other sex, a woman, was called in to see it and I went along with Bose and we were outside the censor board theater and the show was going on and after that they suggested some cuts. And that's how the film got released for which he paid me a glorious remuneration of 100 rupees.

VG: He made films like 'Unmaigal' and he recently made a film with Mahendran which really flopped.

RG: He later on came to me to do some crime film. That didn't work. That was the time when 'Unarchigal'...

VG: Kamal actually had a lot of guts in accepting a role like that, a boy contacting venereal disease.

RG: And I saw the original version which was refused by the censors. There were sequences where Junior Kanchana literally rapes. You remember those scenes. They were all very crudely done that's what I thought. And those were the scenes to which they said the whole thing must go, that entire character, the way that she she literally lies on him. You know there's an attempted simulated sex which you see today in double x-rated video films and things like that. And probably it was a bitter pill for Tamil, but anyway I don't know whether it was such a big success or not.

VG: Only thing was this film had a lot of trouble with completing.

RG: I know it did.

VG: And by that time Kamal had organized Malayalam version of 'Unarchigal'. It was released in Elphinstone theatre. And when this Tamil film was released, they said it was a remake of the Malayalam film. Went well, but not a super success.

RG: 'Oorukku Uzhaippavan' was an M. G. R. film, in which I again wrote a song. It was not a success unfortunately. I don't think so. Because you know that film was made in three languages. I mean that story. It was made in Tamil as 'Oorukku Uzhaippavan' and in Telugu it was called 'Manchivadu' with A. Nageshwar Rao playing the dual role. In Hindi, Rajesh Khanna played it. And Hindi and Telugu both were super hit. But I don't think it was such a success in Tamil.

VG: No it wasn't.

RG: That was the first time Usha, you know Usha Uthup sang in Tamil which is again a very good instance which I'd like to tell you on recording. It should be about M. G. R.'s perception of the art of filmmaking. Now this song composing took nearly three months. We met for some time to time. First, I was told it's a cabaret dance song by Viswanathan and Venus Krishnamurti, in their office. And we came with some dancers there. Halam I think played the caberater dancer. And I went into the erotic

side of it. Come play with me and I am a ball of fire and that sort of approach. And when Viswanathan read out the lyrics which he likes in Tamil as you know and he was not quite happy, M. G. R.. He very politely said I don't like it, you know the way he always talk to people and Vishwanathan from his expression I knew that they didn't help. He also said (Tamil dialogue). So for another month nothing happened. I thought they have done something else with the sequence. Suddenly Venus Kittu called me (Tamil dialogue). Again, we sat and then we went on toying around. M. Krishnan who directed it, he was supposed to make his appearance as (Tamil). I said look Krishnan, I knew him, we were both making films in Malayalam, why don't you ask Mr. M. G. R. and tell me what he has in his mind. Then it could be easy to weave songs instead about attempting and then you're wasting your time and an idea or you're a little scared. So, I asked Vishwanath who had known very well for many years, (Tamil dialogue). He said you tell Randor Guy to link some kind of image which he knows very well (Tamil dialogue). Can you make slightly political (Tamil dialogue)? Then this girl she has the proof about the murder, innocent man was caught and put in jail, Kanchana's husband. So, this girl says, it's easy to fool you to twist and turn you, I came up with that line. Rather corny, but they liked it. He composed it, he liked it very much, the meter and all that you know (Tamil). Again, he went to the (Tamil). So it's easy to fool you to twist and turn you and something catch me if you can. That is the opening line, the female is voicing. So, M. G. R. enters, so I said not so easy to fool and nobody's tool. He loved that line. You know that was the time he had come out of Karunanidhi and trying to be. He said I am nobody's tool and I'm on my own. Then he said (Tamil dialogue). Go ahead, he said. Then we went ahead, and song was the composed. Vaali wrote the Tamil and finally when song recording came, Usha was not, she was the only person who had to sing the song, I was supposed to write this song. Then the question arose Usha (Tamil dialogue). You know she is from Bombay and her Tamil is not that perfect (Tamil dialogue). Then Vishwanath says (Tamil dialogue). Venus Krishnamurthy, he is a producer you know, says (Tamil dialogue). He told me similiary, she said (Tamil dialogue). He is not well, he used to be lying on sofa he couldn't stand. So they rang him again, he was shooting somewhere, they caught him. Then Vishwanathan came and said (Tamil dialogue). M. G. R. said exactly. He said (Tamil dialogue). Exact word she used. So she sang that song in Tamil also. Though her pronunciation was far from perfect, it gelled alright. There I thought this man had a lot of common sense. He tried to find out how exactly things should be done (Tamil dialogue). Very interesting to recall. And 'Kalmadi Kalam' and (indecipherable Tamil Title) are all films which are totally forgotten today. People barely remember them. Don't you think so?

VG : Sure. Run of the mill.

RG : One has to do these things I supposed. (Tamil dialogue) it is attached to biodata. Number keeps on going I suppose. 'Taxi Driver', 'Sattam En Kaiyil'.

VG: 'Sattam En Kaiyil' was....

RG: T. N. Balu.

VG: First time Kamal played dual role.

RG: It was a very successful film.

VG: Made again in Hindi, Telugu. Incidentally I think it was that film Sathyaraj made his debut.

RG: Ya some hatchetman or villan.

VG: I have a, may be of the record, but whoever works with me in a film, they're first but in which I am concerned, they make it great. I have a list of over 25 people right from Kannadasan, Vaali, K. Balachander.

RG: Did you introduce Kannadasan?

VG: Yes, in '47 to Ramnoth in 'Kanniyin Kathali' for Jupiter. We were very good friends. He was working at a magazine called Shakti. He was one of the subeditors.

RG: Balampuri Somnathan.

VG: He owned that magazine.

RG: That's where exactly the music academy office was there, Shakti.

VG: (Tamil dialogue) was editing that magazine, but half a dozen were sub-editors. That was the reason actually Kannadasan did a lot of reading. He used to come to my house (Tamil dialogue). So, that happened and I introduced to Ramnoth and he wrote his first song.

RG: (Tamil song).

VG: Then we, of course, very good friends and used to meet on his birthdays which was 3rd October.

RG: He became one of the....

VG : Sensations, absolutely.

RG : Talking of Kannadasan. I have a personal anecdote, he's quite amusing. We did a song together in Ramanna's film. It's called 'Ennai Pol Oruvan' which was a remake of one of the Hindi films with Dilip Kumar which was in production for, I think, several years. Sivaji plays a double role. He plays the country man and the city man and the contrast, that's the story. He wrote the Tamil part of it and I wrote the English part of it. At that time, he said (Tamil dialogue). Then he was very anxious to do at least one song in English. He also narrated a very good joke about it. How he was trying to speak in English. I believe one day he went to see his loyal B. P. Raman, about some legal...

VG : (Tamil dialogue)

RG : I am talking about the incident which he narrated, the outstanding poet. He told me about that incident at that time and then said we should do songs like that, that was that film. You did not do any role in that film?

VG : In fact, Ramanna is one of the few directors, Ramana and I very good friends. I used to know him from the time he was a sound recording assistant in Neptune Studio. I used to go by cycle and the Chandrababu and the Sadan used to stand near the corner to get some 4 annas from Ramanna.

RG : What were they doing that time?

VG : Nothing, struggling to get into the films.

RG : Both of them, Sadan and Chandrababu?

VG : Both of them.

RG : And where was Ramanna living at that time?

VG : Ramanna used to go to Neptune Studios in a fine cycle. So did Rajabali when he was coming to Gemini Studios. In fact, every cinema i used to go to, Ramanna used to be there all right. But we have never worked together.

RG : That film was 'Ennai Pol Oruvan', an offbeat film. Gopi, I think we will now switch on to a different kind of approach. Instead of going through individual film because you have done nearly 300. We could talk about some of the directors, some of the heroes, heroines of some note, worth hopefully. With whom you have worked, about

whom you could say in relation with the films you did with them. Now for instance, you have said a few things about M. G. R, about his knowledge of cinema, about his capacity to feel the pulse of the audience right from the time he chooses the title of his film, very highly significant. And now we will start with Mrs.M. G. R., V. N. Janaki, currently the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Did you do any films with her in the early days, when she was acting?

VG : Except that we have been in the same film that is 'Chandralekha', I haven't acted with her. But I have known her now for over 45 years, when she was a dancer in Madras artists corporation.

RG : K. Subbulakshmi's troupe.

VG : No, K. Subramaniam's organization, where used to play Krishna and this lady used to play Rukmani. You know I have seen her dance.

RG : They were staging dance dramas there.

VG : Yes, dance dramas and I've seen them perform in RR Sabha stage.

RG : Rasika Ranjani Sabha.

VG : That's right and then when I was working in 'Miss Malini', she was in Gemini studios in Chennai.

RG : Was she there on a full-time basis?

VG : She was monthly paid artist at Gemini. And later on I have seen her act in Modern Theaters, Jupiter's and all that. So I was there in some other film. I've known her for a very long time and she's one of those who calls me Gopu, like my mother even now calls me Gopu. Except that, I saw her recently, on the fifth I saw her, you know to condole and also to congratulate her being chosen as a Chief Minister. Nothing much to say about her as an artist. I haven't worked with her, very very much senior to me.

(Audio breaks)

RG : We were talking of your association with Sivaji Ganeshan.

VG : Yes we started acting together in 'Nane Raja'. I told you earlier, started with a little, small friction. But we became very good friends and we have done number of pictures

together and I said there was a little break of 10 years. From 1982 onwards, I have done about easily 10-15 film with him.

RG: Do you remember any of the later films?

VG: Later film is 'Chiranjeevi', a film where we you know went on the ship Chidambaram for about 15-16 days.

RG: That was not a very successful film, was it?

VG: A very bad failure.

RG: Why what happened? What went wrong with it? It came on TV recently.

VG: Yeah this was you know Sivaji Ganesan playing a laterine cleaner. They have a name for that and this laterine cleaner sort of put his hand around.....

RG: Was it Alaska?

VG: No, no. It's called, they have a name for it, you know this man does such dirty work. But here this man sort of hobnobs with the captain, he puts his arm around him, sings and things like that. It was stated for Sivaji Ganesan you know. It wasn't a big success, a waste of time, real waste of time. And then he himself called me to act in a role as a lawyer. I was called Terror Rang Bashi.

RG: Which film was that?

VG: It was a film directed by one Krishna, a writer you know.

RG: Who calls himself Vijay Krishna.

VG: And then of course we then we've done a lot of films together and we are very fond of each other. I have a lot of respect for him. In fact, there were days when he and I used to go to films every day. Night shows, 9 30. Even when I had a play, he used to bring a couple of scotch drinks for me, plus idlis and everything. I used to eat in the theatre. Just bring it from his house. I used to drop him in his house, then go back home. He was very fond of movies. We must have seen, I don't know hundreds of films together. Every night, whenever we were in Madras, every night we used to see a film and of course a couple of days back I had to see him on his elder brother's demise.

RG: You said you worked in 'Unarchigal' with Kamal, his first film.

VG: In Tamil, yes, as a hero.

RG: Earlier was he doing small roles, I don't remember? He was on stage with T. K. S.. 'Kalathur Kannamma', he was a child artist.

VG: That's right. But hasn't he done some film with Balchander, in supporting roles?

RG: Supporting roles, he has.

VG: As I said, he brought Sakthi to me one day.

RG: R. C. Sakthi.

VG: And said, Sir we are making a picture, would you like to do a role. And that's how I met Sakthi through Kamal. But Kamal right from the start impressed me as one of the the finest actors in the world today and I won't be surprised if he bags an Oscar for a film. I rate him very high among actors and in our time, he can tackle any role and I don't think the proper material has come his way yet.

RG: His best film has yet to come as they say.

VG: He is wonderful. He's a man who can really perform and I wish some real great director handles him. In fact, I told once to Sivajii, I would like Satyajit ray to handle you and then he will get much better work out of you than our directors here. They are even afraid to ask for a second take. Like that Kamal if he gets into you know a David Lean or somebody like that. And Rajini, Rajini and I are the best of pals. He likes me a lot. I like him a lot and we started working in a film called 'Aayiram Jenmangal' in 1977.

RG: Was it something like a ghost story or something?

VG: Something like that, yes.

RG: Remake of Malayalam film.

VG: Probably it was done later, the Malayalam came later. The Tamil was the first.

RG: This is the film which that the journalist, Sivaji is a journalist (Tamil), that was the remake of Malayalam film which was directed by Sheela.

VG : Anyway, he comes into my room and says, Sir i am Rajinikant, I like you very much. I respect you as an artist and you look like a brother. He has a brother called Nagesh I believe. I look like him and till to date, he has the same kind of reaction to me. Though he has escalated into all India star and now even has done an English film, he has a couple of English films now being offered to him. Even recently we were working in a film called 'Dharmathin Thalaivan', the latest, probably the only Tamil film he is doing now at the moment. He is a great performer and even he is capable of very good work like you know he did 'Aarilirunthu Arubathu Varai '.

[210 mins]

RG : Totally offbeat film.

VG : Yes, and 'Enkeyo Ketta Kural', the last two three reels, magnificent work. And I work with all the young director like now Bhagyaraj.

RG : What do you think of Bhagyaraj, he has been very successful.

VG : Bhagyaraj is a very dedicated man. In fact, his respect to senior artists is unbelievable. He always called me Gopi Sir. And that was the first time I had met him in 'Darling, Darling, Darling'. I did one picture after that with him, 'Chinna Veedu'. He was very nice to me and he's a chap who sort of talks, eats, sleeps, dreams films all all the time. He, whenever you meet him, he tells you about the sequence you know, before this what will come, after this what will come. 24 hours, it is an obsession, the film he is making. I enjoyed working with him 'Darling, Darling, Darling'. He again has, like M. G. R., a peculiar you know something which the successful men have.

RG : Charisma. Call it charisma.

VG : And he's a big success because he again caters to the last man. Doesn't worry very much about technique. Though he has had good cameramen like Ashok Kumar and others working for him. And Rajendar again is a phenomenon. I enjoyed working with him. I have done about what two films with him now. I did 'Oru Thayin Sabhatham' and now I'm making 'En Thangai Kalyani', to be released shortly.

RG : We are together in the, film director association, so he is the President and I am the Vice President.

VG : Oh yes. I don't think even you can compare him to Chaplin because what Rajendar has undertaken to do, even Chaplin has not done it in his hey day. The man writes the

script, he writes his songs, tunes his songs, acts the main role, operates the camera, he's the cameraman. Both Bhagyaraj and Rajendar have said this (Tamil Dialogue).

RG: Did you have any film with 'Bharathiraja'?

VG: I have not worked with him as a director, but he was an assistant director in a film I worked with Jagannathan a film called (indecipherable) which was produced by K. R. G.. Which had Thengai Srinivasan and Sowcar Janaki in the main roles. And Mr. Bharthiraja was then an assistant.

RG : Bharthiraja did some work for me. My first film then he was Pandi, not Bharathiraja. He was doing a Tamil film. Mine was Malayam, my first film, that was called (indecipherable - Moham) and he was doing a Tamil film called 'Dhakam', for one of the institute chaps. He has become a priest now, Christian Priest, Babu Nanthankode. Thomas was his name and that is the film had Muthuraman, the blind hero and then there was another Bengali lady Nanditha Bose who was the heroine. For some reason, this Thomas Babu Nanthankode and Nanditha Bose were not on talking terms and the entire work used to be done by Pandi, now Bharthiraja. And it had a common editor, Ramesh. He is again from the institute and he used to come and help on that film. Also, at that time he was always in a dhoti and he had short hair. At the present he has colorful shirts and long hair. After that I met him couple of times, I don't think he has changed. He's still the same chap I could see. At that time, he was bubbling with ideas and that was the time when he told me this story, he used to tell me (Tamil dialogue) and he did the dubbing all by himself. That was one stroke of luck he had, the director not talking to the artist. So the assistant director, he was the assistant director on that film, used to come and help us in editing. So, all the work was done by him. Thomas used to stay out, smoking one of his favorite beedis and I used to say what are you doing here, your place is inside. No no she is a stuck-up dame, he said. She is the wife of some industry secretary in Tamil Nadu government, that Bose. Some clash of egos and that was very interesting. N. B. Srinivasan scored music for that film. It did not do very well but it was noticed.

VG: '16 Vayathinile' was a lovely film.

RG: It was a very big success.

VG: Kamal again came out with a great performance.

RG: It really made him. Then came the other films of Bharathiraja.

VG : Plenty since then. I haven't worked with him. So now we meet very often in this Platinum Jubilee Committee. He is also on the committee. So I go to the chamber for the meetings, he's there. And what else Randor?

RG : You have been in the field for nearly 45 years from 1943. A lot of water has flown under the bridge and quite a few bridges are also changed, besides the water. What changes do you see from say 1943, when you went into Gemini or whatever, and today in 1988? What are the changes you saw?

VG : There were less number of films under production those days.

RG : Quantitatively.

VG : And now more number of films are being produced.

RG : What do you think of the quality?

VG : Quality wise I don't think we are anywhere near the pictures we made those days, content-wise. Let's say about 60 pictures were released every year then and now about almost 200 pictures are getting released and the percentage of success remains the same. One or two pictures click really in a big way, about eight or ten make great. So, the rest about 190 pictures fail. That is because lack of attention to scripts, lack of planning and they go in for artists who don't last. By the time they book and by the time they release, the artist has gone out of the market. Technically, I may say, that you are improved that is you have all sorts of zooms and things like that and nobody shoots.

RG : As a technician and filmmaker myself I think this statement has to be qualified. We have more equipment, we have more facilities.

VG : They don't shoot, for instance, with Mitchell these days. Nobody shoots.

RG : But I don't think because we have more sophisticated equipment, the quality has increased.

VG : I don't think so. I again think black and white films must be made.

RG : I know.

VG : In fact, I think better camera work could be done only in black and white, not colour.

RG : Lighting is very difficult in black and white.

VG : Having seen some of the greatest cameramen in our days, I still feel very sorry that the audience, they don't have panache for black and white. In fact, they say that film 'The Pearl', the Mexican film with Pedro Armendariz, they say it's a lesson for cameraman in black and white photography.

RG : I think the dedication which is totally lacking today.

VG : And everybody wants to act, the director wants to act, the producer wants to act, you know.

RG : Because see the other day I met Mr. K. B. Rangnathan, you know him, Newton's product, the old directors. He was telling me about the way, Jitan Banerjee, the famous cameraman of Newton. He said after the film was shot and the rushes came, he used to take a bit, say about 50 feet or 60 feet or 200 feet whichever, depending on what particular shot they were using and then he used to cut single frames at random, take it to his house and he had a kind of a slide projector or a magic lantern as they used to call it in those days, put these frames in that and throw the image on a wall in his house. He was living on (indecipherable) road somewhere. And with a glass of whiskey in his hand in the evenings and nights, he used to watch every frame intently, trying to know what was the lighting, what was the intensity, evenness is it okay, how was the processing, how was the developing because he was in control of the studio itself, he himself is one of the directors. So, the next morning he used to come and tell people, this can be improved, that particular shot, the lighting is not very imaginative, I will redo that. This kind of dedication he used to have, whoever the producer was whichever production it was. I don't think any cameraman today, even my own Ashok Kumar. I brought him into movies in a way. I don't think even he has that kind of dedication, though he is a dedicated cameraman.

VG : No, but where is the time for dedication now? Even if Ashok Kumar wants to be dedicated, he is not given time. I don't think it's allowed. The director you know is in a hurry.

RG : The director himself has no dedication.

VG : Only because of dedication the industry is in such a way that things are all done in a hurry. See if there are stars for instance and the man who's working, a man or woman who is working in about a dozen films at the same time. So, they have to crank so much within such a short time.

RG : But that's not giving you the results you see when you say.

VG : Agreed.

RG : It is not giving them a lesson, this is not the way to do it.

VG : Agreed. But then the the setup is such that one has to finish within a short time. And I haven't I haven't yet come across a man who wants to take a film without fixing the release date beforehand. You know I will do my film and I will release it when the film is ready. When I think the film is ready.

RG : Yeah no such filmmaker today.

VG : Absolutely not. If there is one, I'm prepared to work with him for free.

RG : And another question which I asked many people, was in connection with films in the old days. The treatment of violence and sex, what do you think of the old days and today?

VG : There wasn't any violence and sex at all. In fact, 'Malaikalan' was given an A certificate in those days thinking it was very violent. It dealt with a man who was, you know, like Don Juan, robbing the rich, feeding the poor, things like that. Even that was given an A. These days I mean no comparison at all. It's all violence. It's all sex in some kind or form. But then the whole world is like that. In fact, Tamil films, I will say, have much less sex and violence than the western films.

RG : That's true. The world has become more permissive.

VG : Absolutely and the words you hear in the films that were not mentioned in those days. I saw a film with Robert De Niro. Every moment he opened his mouth there was a fucking...

RG : I know.

VG: This is there on stage, it is there on screen, it is there on books, in literature, in short story, magazines.

RG: And anything else you would like to say, like to add, as an actor?

VG: I just would like to say this that I am an optimist, a very cheerful man. Even though the films now, as we said, quantitatively have increased and not qualitatively and all that, there will be some good films in the future. Some man might come up and say I do this and I am expecting for that day.

RG : Another question I want to ask you is something which as a filmmaker, film historian, technician and what not, the question of dubbing in our films. Now if you take any artist today whether it's a man or a woman, very rarely he or she speaks with his or her own voice. And you know you are a stage artist too. You know a voice is part of a man or a woman's personality and it is totally lost and invariably, a new class called dubbing artists has come up now in Tamil as well as in Telugu. And you see the same girl, various heroines, the same kind of inflections, the same kind of outbursts hoos and has, and sobs, it sort of makes it like a cliché and it is very nauseating.

VG: I know the amount paid to the heroine and amount paid to the dubbing artist, no comparison at all.

RG: Oh I know I know. I have dealt with some of them, so I know some of them very intimately. You work for me as I have produced some dubbing films also. But this is something which is totally something I just can't even tolerate. But it's forced on you, what do you think? Now just imagine Shivaji Ganeshan being voiced by somebody else.

VG: That's right. I can't imagine Sivaji being voiced by somebody else. But in the last 10 years, all our heroines have been Non-Tamil girls and they've all been dubbed, including Mohan our hero. You know you have some men actors like Vijay Kant, Prabhu, Karthik, Chandrasekhar, all Tamalians. They don't need dubbing. But in dubbing itself, a little of the original is lost.

RG: Definitely.

VG: Even when say, for instance, Amitabh Bachchan, they say he dubs his dialogues every morning because even if it's shot indoors, even if the voice is good, he likes to, you know, sort of keep the mic near him and he has a lovely voice. But even then, what you do, the little things you know, when you're crying or when you're laughing, in between words all that will be lost and done. But then there are some professional dubbing artists, who do much better than the heroines themselves. See, they in fact

supply a little more than what was originally planned. So, it works both ways. So, it's a thing which you'll have to accept, you'll have to.

RG : The one thing about dubbing which is the very basic of film theory. You know when you shoot in a sound stage or wherever the shooting takes place, the sound comes through filtered with all these sounds around and what is known as sound perspective. You know light has a perspective, even sound has a perspective, that is totally lost when you dub. Because everybody is speaking from a single source, the mic, which is inside the studio and this has been present everywhere.

VG : So unreal.

RG : Definitely unreal. Supposing a man is talking in a desert, you know that voice is recorded indoors, sometimes even the slight echo which you will not hear in a desert. Whatever filtering you do, whatever turning.

VG : The whole thing is unreal. You see a song sequence in a Tamil film or in any film. Where there's waterfalls in the background, you don't hear the waterfall, you only hear the two voices. So silly.

RG : I know it is. That's why it is something which always upsets me.

VG : I've been a dubber myself. I have dubbed for about i think twenty, thirty pictures.

RG : One of the films you spoke for Vishnuvardhan.

VG : I spoke for him in 'Alaigal'. But early days I have dubbed for Nageswara Rao in a film called (indecipherable title). That ran for 100 days in Tamil Nadu. I was the man for voice for Nageswara Rao then. Later K. V. Mahadevan's wife, Leela, she was the one who gave voice for Anjali Devi. We used to in fact give voices for hero heroin in a number of movies, plus we have acted in some very celebrated radio plays together. She has a glorious voice. But then as a dubber I feel it's even in my own films and I don't know whether you saw this, (indecipherable title) recently, where my wife dies and I cry. Whatever I could do on the sets I was not prepared to do. I was not able to do it only when I was dubbing it. Definitely not. The little things you know, especially for a stage actor like me, I can improvise. In fact, some of the dialogues they were not written by Sakthi. Now they were supplied by me on spur of the moment you see. In fact, when one shot recently, Rajendar did not say cut at all. I had to keep on crying you know. I had to improvise words and then finally, finally after a long time he says cut and said (Tamil). But that when I dub it, it won't be as good as that.

RG : Naturally, spontaneity is not there. That's one of the things which always, that's only the reasons I suppose I don't know whether you realize it. When we do our tv serials, we are doing together. I've always avoided dubbing. I have succeeded so far.

VG : They came so well also.

RG : I know. It can be done. Actually, it will be of interest to you. The Madras Film Institute, the Tamil Nadu Film Institute where they are now teaching video techniques also, they wanted to know whether we had dubbed. You know even our outdoor is not dubbed in (indecipherable Tilt) and 'The Fourteenth Guest' which we did. And our Jaya Kumar who is our recordist, is very brilliant as you know, he has done all that. And credit goes to him really. And when he said that the Randor Guy did not dub even a single line in those serials you saw, they refused to believe him. They said it can't be done. No sir there was no dubbing at all and even those outdoor sequences you know that sequence where we shot in the forest, where we were chasing some people and all that. All Gopi spoke amongst those hills and what you hear is only the voice that was recorded on the hills. And if he spoke on the road, he was on the road. He spoke in the Anna Nagar desolate area and Neelangarai beach, it was all Neelangarai beach and there was no dubbing at all. We never went anywhere near dubbing theatre. And they did not, not only believe him, they asked for the tape. And yesterday he took the tape from our office to show it to them and I believe Jaya Kumar has been asked to speak about how he did it. It shows that it can be done. I don't know the consequences of when you are making a movie, so many artists and things like, that that's one of the things.

VG : No with Arri Flex camera you have to dub you know, because the camera. But there is that thing also for Arri.

RG : Yeah but it doesn't work all right.

VG : I don't know.

RG : I think you have said everything that has to be said.

VG : And thank you Randor. It was such a beautiful thing talking to you.

RG : I must thank you on behalf of P. K. Nair and National Film Archive of India. Thank you, Gopi, thanks a lot.

VG : Thank you.

RG : That was the interview with V. Gopalakrishnan recorded at his residence in T. Nagar, Madras. Gopalakrishnan, our Gopi to all of us, his good friends, continues to be as active as ever in Tamil cinema and as I said earlier you see him in almost every other film in Tamil. Lately he has placed a new trail in doing TV serials for Doordarshan Kendra screened over Doordarshan Kendra and two of my own TV serials, sponsored serials, the first one was called 'The 14th Guest' and another one (indecipherable title), both are crime thrillers written, directed and produced by me. Gopi played the anchorman, the detective inspector, Divakar in 'The 14th Guest' and Inspector Wasu in (indecipherable title) and both the serials were huge successes and that has opened a new avenue of activity for Gopi as a TV star and we have many such projects on television and also on video films made specially for what they call the VCR population. These are all the fresh avenues waiting to be conquered by this great actor and good friend. And I wish him on behalf of all of us an excellent glorious career to continue for all time to come.