

Address By Smt. D. Purandeswari (MoS-HRD) as Chief Guest on the Occasion Of the 79th Birth Day Celebrations Of Dr. Sivaji Ganeshan in Chennai on 1st October, 2007.

Thiru Ram Kumar, Thiru N. Ram other distinguished guests and friends, I am extremely happy to be present here to participate in the 79th birth day celebrations of Dr. Sivaji Ganeshan the doyen of Indian Film Heroes in this country.

For Nearly left a century Dr. Ganeshan dominated the Tamil Cinema like colossus . During this period he was almost household name in the state of Tamilnadu and beyond. He inspired the public with his great message that films could be at once source of entertainment, education and inspiration to the masses.

Along with M.G. Ramachandran, Sivaji Ganesan dominated Tamil Cinema to such an extent that the two automatically demanded Madras distribution rights in their contracts and could bankrupt a producer by causing production delays and stalling a film's release if they so desired.

Born Viluppuram Chinnaiah Ganesan in Sirkali, Tamil Nadu, his father moved to Viluppuram where he spent his early years. When he was seven, a travelling drama troupe came to Viluppuram. Sivaji acted as one of the soldiers in the play. His father was appalled that he had acted in some cheap drama and that too in a white man's

part. He was lambasted and punished and ran away from home. He joined a drama troupe touring Tiruchi - Yadharathnam Ponnuswamy and Company. He told the owner he was an orphan and was taken under his wing. It was here that he honed his talents for music and dancing. He learnt Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali and even Manipuri and also trained in Carnatic music. As he moved from troupe to troupe, his reputation as an actor grew.

He made his reputation as an actor in C.N. Annadurai's Sivaji Kanda Indhu Rajyam, a historical on the Maratha Emperor Shivaji. He was asked to play the role at the last moment when the lead actor (an unknown MGR!) backed out. It is said he memorized the entire 95 pages of dialogues in a day! Such was his impact that the play also gave him his screen name viz Shivaji Ganeshan.

When he was 9 years old he ran away from his house. Nobody knew his whereabouts. After many days his mother and elder brother happened to trace him at a place near Trichirapalli where "Kampalaththaan Kooththu" a popular folk drama was taking place. Kattabomman's story was being enacted on stage in that Kooththu. Ganesan was very much interested in that particular drama. Even at that small age he had vowed that one day he would become an actor and do Kattabomman's role on stage. Ganesan's mother brought him back to their house. She arranged through her elder son to get a placement for Ganesan in one of the popular drama troupes. Thus Ganesan first became a stage actor.

His first film is "Paraasakthi". It was released in the year 1952. "Parasakthi" was a great turning point not only in Sivaji Ganesan's acting Career but also for the entire Tamil Cinema Field. Before that there were mainly either Raja Rani Stories or religious and mythological stories with a number of songs which had great sway among Tamil Cinema audience. But "Paraasakthi" was a social film with revolutionery themes and lesser number of songs. More over the heart - catching, fiery dialogue by Kalaingar Karunanidhi made the film a super revolutionery one in terms of it's trend- setting nature and it's overall reformative impact on society.

Bestowed Upon Sivaji Ganesan: In 1962 Sivaji Ganesan toured America as its Special Guest. There, he was given one of the highest houours of being the Mayor of Niagara City for one day. After Prime Minister Nehru, Sivaji was the only Indian to get this honour.

In Hollywood he met world famous actors like Marlon Brando and some leading Cinema technicians. Egyptian President Naasar, Singapore former Prime Minister, Ceylon President Chandrika, Indian former Prime Ministers Nehru, Indra Gandhi, V.P. Singh, former President Dr. Radhakirishnan, former Governer -General Rajaji, former Chief Ministers Kamarajar and Annadurai, Present Chief Minister Kalaingar Karunanidhi, Ex-Chief Ministers M.G.R., RamaRao and Jayalalitha were not only his associates but his very great admirers too!

Since the mid 1970s however, Muthal Mariyathai (1985) is the one major film of Sivaji's that stands out. Not only was the film a commercial success but it also brought Sivaji critical acclaim as well. Although by now the attention had shifted to younger heroes like Rajnikant and Kamal Hassan. Among his more recent films, he did give a strong performance as the latter's father in Thevar Magan (1992) getting a Special Jury Mention for the same.

Sivaji was acknowledged as a consummate actor, vastly imitated but never equalled. His eyes had fire and he was cheered for his resounding voice, which the audience called 'simmakural' or a lion's roar. At the same time however, there has been constant criticism that he 'overacts.' But Sivaji always retorted...

"What is acting? It means doing something that is not natural. So then where is the question of overacting? When your mother dies, what do you do? You shout Amma and cry, don't you? Your instant reaction is to cry out loud. Not sit quietly covering your eyes with your hands. That's exactly what I do in my films."

Sivaji was a member of the Rajya Sabha from 1982 - 88. It is maintained that Sivaji had a more significant iconic presence among the Tamil middle-class leading to his 1980s - 90s deification, than MGR could ever acquire. He has won several awards including the Padma Shri in 1966, the Padma Bhushan in 1984 and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for his contribution to Indian Cinema in

1997. Besides he won innumerable awards and appreciation throughout his prolonged film career.

Mostly retired and plagued by ill-health through the last few years, Sivaji took each day as it came. To quote him...

“I don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow's problems are for another day”

Sivaji passed away in a hospital in Chennai on July 21, 2001 following a prolonged heart ailment.

If there was a matinee idol in the realms of Indian cinematic history who received as much accolades and an equally strong bout of criticism for his histrionic abilities, it was Chevalier Sivaji Ganesan. Given that he never achieved the national status that he deserved perhaps is a reflection of the complexities of the language of his mother tongue that required strong grammar, poetic undertones and louder decibels for dialogue delivery.

Film critics and audience forming the majority in the North of the Vindayas who were used to the much softer, subtle shayaari and ghazals perhaps found it difficult to applaud Sivaji's daredevilry in characterization of roles he depicted in his film career.

Perhaps if he were to be born out of the Dravidian State and culture, there would have been a national consensus that he was the greatest actor Indian cinema ever produced. It is indeed a misfortune to know that Mr. Nehru pleaded ignorance of the actor when President Nasser

of Egypt enquired dearly about him after seeing his stellar performance in "Veerapandia Kattabomman" in the Cairo Film Festival. Nehru did make amends when he made Sivaji the main host when Nasser visited India subsequently!.."

Sivaji Ganesan's voice and diction not only changed the course of dialogue delivery in Tamil films and plays, but also had a deep impact on the manner in which the language is spoken by narrators on radio and television. This is perhaps the most impressive contribution of the late thespian."

Sivaji Ganesan with his extraordinary memory and stentorian voice could captivate his fans with long spells of dialogues in chaste Tamil. He said in an interview that Parasakthi marked a break with the past, when Tamil films used to have 15 or more songs each. "Moreover," he said, "dialogue for me is poetry. I have a passion for poetry. And so, there was no problem for me in rendering it effectively."

Such was the character and film career of Dr. Sivaji Ganeshan who is acclaimed as the doyen of matinee idols and who has been regarded an apostle of art, a paragon of virtue, and a master of craft all put into one. Acting in 300 films in Tamil and three other South Indian Languages and also in Hindi. He is rightly regarded as one of the greatest actors of the world and the most dominating figure on the Indian screen. No doubt, he is a wonderful creation of God possessing perfect artistic talents. He is surrounded with a halo of

glory and charm of his own. His potentialities are unique in the field of Art and Culture. Despite being an atheist he acted in several mythological like Sampurna Ramayanam, Thiruvillaiyadal which sent several messages for the spectators. He was fully aware that the film industries should promote unity, peace and development of society, apart from propagating the need to preserve the country's rich cultural heritage. He started realizing that the film industry should be socially responsible and committed to the cause of upholding human values.

With these words, I once again thank the organizers of this celebrations to give me an opportunity to pay my humble tributes to this great film hero who like M. G.Ramachandran and N.T. Rama Rao practiced what they practiced namely that Cinema is the art of story telling and it should give expression to the many untold stories that reside in the heart of our great nation that is India.