

TIMES OF INDIA – Interview

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BACKBEAT
Nayanthara
to act
with
Mammootty

Praveen Tyagarajan

**TICKET COST 2 PAISA,
M RAN FOR 100 DAYS**

Praveen Tyagarajan

I hate being serious... or upset

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made you start writing?

I studied in Guldy Engineering College. I was brought up in a joint family set-up. Even though none of my family members were into writing, they inspired me to write. They say behind every successful man there is a woman. But in my case, there are several women. Since we were a huge family, I took inspiration from my grandmother, mother, aunt and my wife. But a huge part of my interest began when I was school. My teacher Janaki was the first person who tapped my potential when she enrolled me to play Veerapandiya Kattabomman. As a mark of respect, my female protagonist in all my plays is called Janaki. Since then, I developed an interest in writing.

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Praveen Tyagarajan

What's your take on that?
People always like to complain. It is just some old generation folks getting nostalgic and musing. But let me ask these people... what has been their fate from those days? Journey has changed. I agree you don't have the same fun as those days. But we still have our own unique things to do. Chennai Abhinav has introduced 30 shows and we are looking at the 200th show. Do you think I am still in your life, a huge any profit? Of course, there is a lot of fun. Some people are not interested. They round over the money for the night... in schools and colleges, his plays have been staged abroad and done in a huge reception, even there. There is no question of theatre dying. If you look in good perspective at the age group, people will definitely react to it.

But there seems to be no one who could be called successor to you, Yogi Bhattarai and S Vi Sheshar...
I see so many talented youngsters coming out with their own ideas and strong opinions. Many youngsters work with me, in fact. Most of them have been chosen by me. But it is not like some time for them to reach this position.

Tell us about your upcoming play...
My next is *Goode Goodbye*. It will be a sequel to *Goode Goodbye*. The story is about Madhu, who wants to marry his beloved. Once she's already engaged to be married to someone else. Madhu asks Krishna how to solve this problem. Krishna suggests that he speak to George. George... is Madhu's "servant". George Goodbye is his character. He comes with his assistant Leo and though even Yogi. How he solves the problem from the end. We will be staying in the play in September.

Has there ever been a fall in your life?
There being a... a good "fall" is not easy. This is not a play. The only thing you have to worry about is your name. I am 60 years old and I have never gone for a psychiatric check-up. I don't want to go to a hospital to know what problems I have. Anyway, we will be visiting the hospital if we have a health issue. Who worries now? People should learn to be content. I am happy to have achieved so much. But I don't credit that only to my achievements. I am happy because I want to be happy. I do things that please me. One should learn to be content. The interviewer said, "There is an anecdote behind every situation", but I would say, "There is a joke behind every anecdote".

What is the one thing that you have always wanted to do?
I have become so contented for people to ask me why I don't write in serious topics. But what should I write serious stuff? I can give a serious story with a serious message, but I don't want to do. They think it is a serious message that people feel to write serious. What is seriously done in the culture, I would like to write about. I would like to write about the culture. I love to read, especially about the culture. I am so moved by the culture that I will write a story about the culture.

Pravesh Tyagarajan



Crazy Mohan

IF KAMAL WAS MY VISA TO KOLLYWOOD, WORKING WITH RAJINI WAS THE ICING ON THE CAKE

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I began exploring in-depth when I was in college. I pursued my interest and began my own theatre troupe.

When did your tryst with cinema begin?
I used to work during the day and actively do theatre in the evenings. When I was returning home one day on a scooter, I had to pass through a graveyard to reach my destination. Suddenly, I saw someone calling out my name from the graveyard. I was scared and wondered who was calling me to the graveyard (laughs). As I came closer to the gate, I saw Kamal Haasan waving to me. Surprised by his presence

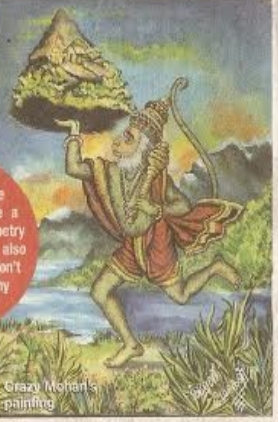
there, I walked inside. He was shooting for a film, and later told me that I should write dialogues for his upcoming film, *Apoorva Sagodharargal*. They say, 'From the cradle to the grave'. But for me it was, 'From the grave to the cradle'. My journey in cinema began right there when I was roped in to write the dialogues for the film. It feels so strange today when I remember my first meeting with him. I was awarded the Best Actor and Best Writer for my play, *Great Bank Robbery* in college. And the award was handed over by Kamal Haasan.

You and Kamal Haasan go back a long way. What makes your combination tick?
When I began working with Kamal, it started off

more as a professional relationship. But over the years, we grew so close that I am more like his brother now. We talk over the phone almost every day. I discuss and take his feedback on almost everything that I write about. Even if I write a love letter to my wife, I discuss it with him before handing it over to my wife (laughs). Unlike his perceived image, Kamal is a jolly guy. When I started off, he took care of me so well and exposed me to all avenues of filmmaking. When someone comes from a non-film background, it is common to go through ordeals in the industry. He protected me and I was treated like his blue-eyed boy. He respects art, and isn't bothered about the success and failure of a film. He is a perfectionist, so much so that even after the release of his film, he keeps making a note of things that need to be changed. He is one actor who can translate the humour I write in my lines without compromising on his Ulagaanyagan status. *Avar Siraji (Ganesan) paathi, Nagesh paathi*.

Tell us some of your memorable experiences working with Kamal...

When I got my first opportunity, I remember my friend's father telling me to include the *Thirukkural* in my writing. I wrote the first dialogue for *Apoorva Sagodharargal* — the scene where Appu kills Delhi Ganesha. When Appu corners him to murder, Ganesha says, "Thamma thundu irundhitu over ah pesura." And Appu retorts, "Thirukkural kooda thamma thoandu. Eeva vilo kullam. Rendu Adh aham. Adhula evlo vishayam irukku?" I wrote it keeping *Thirukkural* in mind. Kamal and Singeetham Srinivasa Rao (the film's director) appreciated the effort. Every film has interesting dialogues written after much thought. While you take a lot of effort in writing, you need someone like Kamal to translate it in the best way possible on-screen.



Crazy Mohan's painting

You've also worked with Rajinikanth in Arunachalam...

Rajinikanth is such a fine gentleman. He is known for his simplicity for a reason. I first got the opportunity to work with Rajini during *Sri Raghavendra*. Since I was working in a company, I couldn't take out so much time and work on this project. I was too scared to leave my job. Everyone dreams of working with Rajini, but then I eventually felt really bad of letting the project go. Later, things fell in place during *Arunachalam*. I have an interesting memory working with him. He's known for his punch dialogues. When Sundar, Rajini and I were breaking our heads to figure out a punch dialogue for this film, nothing worked out. We were sitting on this for over 10 days and he wasn't convinced with the ones I wrote. I was on my

I love to write poetry and write a form of Tamil poetry called Venba. I also paint a lot, but I don't like to exhibit my works.

