



# Remembering Thou, Always

**K. Manoj Kumar**

Obituary to P. Bhaskaran can be full of mesmerising words, as the career was built upon mesmerising world of words, lyrics and reflections. Apart from rendering his contributions, so much has been already done in writings since P. Bhaskaran departed us on February 25, 2007. A focus on what space the protagonist belonged to, what space he yearned to be in, can be a relevant remembrance now.

A recurring question is why some national titles refused to feather on his cap. A slow surf on his cultural, political and literary voyage offers an answer. On the day P. Bhaskaran's demise Chief Minister V. S. Achuthananthan was seen reciting a poem delivering his condolence:

*Padam Padam Urachu Nam*

*Paadi Paadi Pokuka.....*

The poem was the embodiment of a desire for a united Kerala. The song stands

testimony to a genuine and different perspective in which the poet and his life have to be reviewed.

A political activist as a student, he was secretary of the Akhila Kochi Student's Federation. Got six months' imprisonment for participating in the independence movement. His poem 'Vayalar Garjikunnu', based on the Punnapravayalar agitation was banned in the erstwhile state of Travancore. Gradually moving away from the political arena, during the 1947-1948 period he worked on the Editorial Board of the Madras-based publication, 'Jayakeralam'. For a short while he worked with the All India Radio in Kozhikode.

Starting off as a lyricist with four lines for a song in the Tamil film Apoorvasahodarangal he made his debut in Malayalam with the film Chandrika (1950) and close on the heels followed Navalokam (1951). The lyrics he composed

for Neelakkuyil (1954) established an independent stream in the history of Malayalam film music. With the portrayal of rural life in Malabar and the free rendering of the colloquial usages he liberated the lyrical idiom of the language from the clutches of Hindi and Tamil.

P. Bhaskaran worked with composers spread over many generations. The large corpus of his work for films has earned him recognition and honour.

Making his directorial debut in Neelakkuyil (1954) with Ramu Kariat, he has done the role of a postman for the same. Following Neelakkuyil, he directed Raarichan Enna Pauran (1956). The films he directed under various banners in the sixties include the adaptation of

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Parapurathu's novel Adyakaranangal (1964) and the M. T. Vasudevan Nair short-story Irutinte Atmavu (1967). Irutinte Atmavu which won the President's Silver Medal is considered a milestone in his directorial career.

## Selected Filmography

Raarichan Enna Pauran (1956), Nayaru Pidicha Pulivalu (1958), Laila Majnu (1962), Bhagyajathakam (1962), Ammayekanaan (1963), Aadyakaranangal (1964), Syamalachechv (1965), Tharavattamma (1966), Shichu Kandethiyilla (1967), Iruttinte Aatmavu (1967), Laksha prabhu (1968), Kaattukurangu (1969), Mooladhanam (1969), Kallichellamma (1969).

The turbulent days of communism in the early years required stirring by enchanting lyricists and sloganeers. The party owe great to P. Bhaskaran for his poems and slogans, which played true keys to the young hearts.

Communist Party deputed him to organise handloom and textile workers of Amballor and then to Engandiyoor. In Engandiyoor he stayed in a country teashop (the like one seen in the sets of Neelakkuyil). The real making of P. Bhaskaran took place during his tryst with workers of toddy, handloom and textile. The period was the grooming time for linguistic skills and folk diction. Phrasal and verbal magic found a fondling tenant in him. A process unmistakably made thousands of admirers for Bhaskaran Master elsewhere.

Just before the Punnapra – Vayalar revolt P. Bhaskaran was arrested and remanded in custody. For days together the physical torture on him continued in lock up. Though frailed in brutality, his creative mind sharpened and strengthened enough to pen down ‘Uyarum Njan Naadake.’ Released from jail he paid a visit to the turmoiled soil of Vayalar and the visit gave birth to the historic ‘Vayalar Garjikkunnu.’

A ‘jailbirds’ experience naturally contributes to the making of a man. Many political stalwarts of the time were inside jails. Those outside were also within walls! In Jail, his cellmate was none other than K. Karunakaran, the former many time Chief Minister of Kerala.

The discussions between the two eminent persons from different realms might have been a valuable volume, if penned and published. ‘Who had bigger influence on whom’ is a question remains unanswered.

It was P. Bhaskaran who sown the seed of social realism in Malayalam cinema through his maiden work, the Neelakkuyil, by which Malayalam movie marked its presence in the national scenario. He linked social life to our filmdom and filmdom to Malayalam literature. From Uroob to M.T. Vasudevan Nair scripted for him. Thus, two art forms - cinema and literature - started to interact each other in Malayalam. That was happened one year prior to Pather Panjali, the masterpiece of Sathayjith Rai. How Neelakkuyil was happened? We can hear that from P. Bhaskaran himself:

Ramu Kariat was my childhood friend. So was cameraman Vincent. We always argued about a new sensitivity for Malayalam films. We criticised the films with neither Malayali life nor nature in it.

From then on we had a desire to make

a film...a typically Malayalam one with a good social, human, progressive message.

Meanwhile Ramu Kariat called me from Madras saying ‘a producer has come in handy, he doesn’t know anything about Cinema, but is willing to invest. We can make the film the way we want to. T K Pareekutty was the producer. All the film stories till then were based on South Kerala. Therefore a story based on the life of Malabar, Kochi and Central Kerala would be a novelty. We also decided to have folk music, a natural one and agreed to call our friend Raghavan of AIR. Neelakkuyil was created after much discussion and pondering on points like this.

Ramu Kariat, Uroob and Raghavan Master were the others in the team.

As mentioned at the beginning P. Bhaskaran defined a space of his own landscape in life’s reality. He created literature deep-rooted to soil but what was his space he yearned to be in? The vacuum caused by his demise may find an answer.

“If Malayalam cinema is recognised

today at least at the national level, the credit goes to the literary works in Malayalam, which were adapted to the screen, just as Bengali literature has helped evolve Bengali cinema in significant ways. Malayalam literature has always closely reflected Malayali life and its screenplay adaptation has only improved its quality.”

I can in all humility claim that I had always worked to bring literature close to cinema.

The word memory had an immense obsession with P. Bhaskaran. The panes of memory in his brain had fallen one by one. His unmemorable memory of obsession – his poems and charity rendering - might not have flowed in during his final days. The most unfortunate forgetfulness a poet can have. In one of the last public appearances, organised by the Information and Public Relations Department, he pleaded the audience ‘Orkkuka vallappozhum’ – Remember me, at times.

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## Statement about ownership and other particulars of Kerala Calling Monthly

(Form IV – See rule 8)

1. Place of Publication	:	Thiruvananthapuram
2. Periodicity of Publication	:	Monthly
3. Printer’s Name	:	Jiji Thomson IAS
Whether citizen of India	:	Yes
Address	:	Principal Secretary, Information and Public Relations, Govt Secretariat Thiruvananthapuram
4. Publisher’s Name	:	Jiji Thomson IAS
Whether citizen of India	:	Yes
Address	:	Principal Secretary, Information and Public Relations, Govt Secretariat Thiruvananthapuram
5. Editor’s Name	:	Jiji Thomson IAS
Whether citizen of India	:	Yes
Address	:	Principal Secretary, Information and Public Relations, Govt Secretariat Thiruvananthapuram
6. Name and Address of individual who own the newspaper	:	Government of Kerala

I, Jiji Thomson IAS, declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Thiruvananthapuram,  
9.03.2007.

Sd/-  
Jiji Thomson IAS  
Publisher