

# The Birth of A New Medium : The Silent Era of South Indian Cinema

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## *Introduction*

By the turn of this century there appeared a new entertainment form in India, the cinema, which in the decades that followed was to assume the dimensions of a major socio-cultural force. The phenomenon of moving pictures first demonstrated in Watson Hall, Bombay, continued to attract people even after the novelty of the device wore off and cinema shows became part of day-to-day life.<sup>1</sup> It was soon permeating into all aspects of life as the most predominant entertainment form. In a society that was so rigidly stratified, a mass art, the popularity of which cut across all sections, was by itself a totally new phenomenon and it opened up an area in which popular and elitist culture could meet and interact.

No other entertainment had even been so universal in appeal and so mass-oriented. One of the reasons for its popularity was its cheapness, even the poorest could afford. This was an entertainment form which was mechanically reproduced so as to facilitate mass distribution and exhibition and therefore could be offered at a low cost. Where the traditional art forms and recreational facilities had been catering to exclusive sections, such a reproduction had far-reaching consequences. Therefore to understand the socio-cultural matrix of the present day South Indian society, it would be helpful to examine the beginning and growth of cinema here. Such a study could provide insights not only into the nature of the cinema that evolved out of it but into the nature of the community that patronises it.

While the origins of all the existing art forms and entertainment media are lost in antiquity, that of cinema can be confidently traced with sufficient authenticity. Its birth marked the beginning of the era of mass medium which was to change the society as no other medium had done before. The very nature and status of popular culture was to be tremendously affected by the growth of this medium. Any cinema, evolving as it does out of its earlier forms, is very much a product of its past and explanations to many of its peculiar characteristics may lie in its history. Because it affects the lives of people deeply and as films of any particular period mirror the tensions and concerns of the society that nurtures it, a study of the appearance of cinema in South India becomes essential to an understanding of its present character and its role in the lives of men.

Cinema appeared at a momentous period when the country was poised for major social and political changes. In South India, the Social Reform Movement, started by leaders like Veerasalingam Pantulu and Kamakshi Natarajan, had gained momentum by the support lent by the Home Rulists and the debates on social reforms had been carried into legislative forums. Since the moving of Hindu Post-puberty bill in the Madras Legislative Council in 1914 upto the time of the passing of the Sarda Act of 1930, child marriage was a much discussed question. So was the rehabilitation of widows. The Depressed Classes Mission Society of Madras founded in 1919 was carrying on its propaganda through its branches in many places in the province.<sup>2</sup> The argument for the related subject of Temperance had gained strength by this work and in 1927 the Madras Legislative Council had resolved that prohibition should be implemented within twenty years.<sup>3</sup> The question of extending to low caste Hindus access to temples was also being discussed widely. Seeds of political awakening had been sown by the Home Rule Movement and the later Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements under Mahathma Gandhi gave a fillip to this growing national consciousness. His tour of South India along with Ali brothers in 1920 had prepared the ground for these movements. It was in this context that the new mass medium slowly made its appearance.

Introduction of technological innovations was effecting, in varying degrees, a slow transformation in a way of life that had remained unchanged for centuries. Cars had appeared on the roads of major towns and was already a status symbol for the wealthy and the powerful. By the middle of the twenties, aeroplane flights had been demonstrated in Madras. Though there was no Tamil feature in the programmes of Indian Broadcasting Service which had set up transmitters in Madras, hundreds of gramophone records had been released, bringing classical music to the masses for the first time and standardising folk music. A new force in the formation of public opinion, the press, was making a beginning. The first Tamil daily *Swadesamitran* had come into being as early as 1889 and in 1917 the second daily *Desabakttan* was started. As the struggle for freedom gained momentum, number of new journals and dailies in Tamil, including *Jayabharathi* and *Desobakhari* came up. This trend had affected book publication also and a number of books in vernacular languages supporting nationalistic cause came out. In the realm of communications, this was a virtual revolution.

In this paper, an attempt is being made in addition to providing empirical date regarding the birth, the growth and the decline of the silent cinema in South India, to examine the historical context and the socio-cultural milieu in which the new art made its appearance, the pressures to which it was subjected and how the young cinema played its role in the social and political changes that were in the offing.

## The History

Almost immediately after their first cinematograph show in Paris in 1895, Lumiere brothers sent their agents to various countries with films and equipment to demonstrate and commercially exploit their achievement.<sup>4</sup> One team arrived in India and gave their first show in Bombay in 1896, followed by daily screenings. The next year Madras was introduced to moving pictures when one Edward held similar shows in Victoria Public Hall; but only in 1900 when Major Warwick set up the first cinema house in Madras, the Electric Theatre, in the building that later housed Mount Road post office, did regular commercial shows begin.<sup>5</sup> In 1907 Cohen established another cinema house, the Lyric cinema in the present Elphinstone talkies site, but this got burnt down in an accident.<sup>6</sup> By this time there were clear indications of cinema emerging as a mass entertainment and some enterprising Indians beginning with Swamikannu Vincent, a draftsman in Railways in Tiruchi, saw this as a new area of business. In 1905, Dupont, a touring cinema exhibitor from France who was passing through Tiruchi decided to return home when he fell ill and offered his equipment for sale. Vincent bought this, established 'Edison's Cinematograph' a touring cinema and began showing short reels like *Life of Jesus Christ*. After a successful spell in Tiruchi, he moved over to Madras and later toured all over India exhibiting films. When micro-egaphone, a movie projector into which was incorporated a gramophone, thus creating a synchronised sound effect was introduced, Vincent bought one machine, renamed his touring cinema as 'Edison's Grand Cinemegaphone' and gave the first show in 1909 at Esplanade grounds Madras. He also took agency for Pathe projectors, a step which enabled some more touring cinemas to appear in Madras province.<sup>7</sup> At the same time R. Venkiah, a still photographer of Madras, began giving synchronised shows in Victoria Public Hall. Encouraged by the increasing interest shown in these shows, he also established a touring cinema and went around the country and later to Burma and Sri Lanka also, before returning to Madras to build a permanent theatre in the city, the Gaiety in 1913; he later added Crown (1914) and Globe (1915 the present Roxy) to his exhibition chain.<sup>8</sup>

While Vincent and Venkiah restricted their activity to exhibition of films, an automobile spare-parts dealer in Madras, R. Nataraja Mudaliar saw the possibility of producing films relating to Indian subjects. Already R. G. Torney and D. G. Phalke had since 1912, made films on Indian mythology and shown the way. Mudaliar got in touch with Stewart Smith, the cinematographer in Lord Curzon's durbar. A meeting was arranged in Poona and after a brief talk with Mudaliar, Smith showed how to operate a movie camera and asked him to crank a scene. The first effort to the aspiring film-maker was shown in an after-dinner screening in Smith's Poona residence. The lack of uniform speed in hand-cranking had resulted in ludicrous movements, Smith, however, encouraged Mudaliar and made

him stay for some more time in Poona, mastering the art of cranking; Nataraja Mudaliar returned to Madras and with the help of his business associate S. M. Dharmalingam Mudaliar started a film producing concern, The India Film Company, in 1916.<sup>9</sup>

The studio, the first in South India, was set up in Millers Road, Kilpauk with Nataraja Mudaliar as the director, cinematographer and editor. A laboratory was established in Bangalore—the climate there was more conducive for processing—and Narayanaswami achari, who had been trained in processing methods, was put in charge. Exposed film rolls were rushed to Bangalore daily and every Sunday Mudaliar would go to supervise the work. On the acting side, Rangavadivelu was engaged to train actors. Within 35 days, the first film of the company and the first one to be made in South India *Kicakavatam* (1916) was ready for screening. Distribution rights for Bombay area was given to Adersh Irani and for Bengal, Madans bought the rights. This was soon followed by *Traupathi Vastirāparaṇam* (1917), and Mudaliar, planning to move into independent production, left the company.<sup>10</sup>

He went back to his native town, Vellore and began to make films; within a month he produced, single-handedly two films *Mahirāvāṇan* (1919) and *Mārkaṭṭēya* (1919), shot in Vellore fort and in the hills around the town. He went on to make three more films in Vellore; but after this spurt, Nataraja Mudaliar could not sustain his productions in the absence of proper financing and gave up film-making in 1923.<sup>11</sup>

Venkiah, flourishing all these years as an exhibitor, decided to embark upon film production and as a preliminary step sent his son Raghubathy Prakasa to England to be trained in film-making. As a pioneer film-maker who, along with A. Narayanan, put South Indian cinema industry on a sound basis and whose career lasted long into the talkie era (he died in 1957), Prakasa deserves a closer look. On a fee of 500, he joined Barker Motion Picture studio as an apprentice in 1919; no one systematically taught him film making but he was allowed to be around and learn by himself. He observed work in all branches and even played a bit role as an Indian in a film made there. He returned to India after a year, visiting Pathe studio on his way. Back in Madras, he set up a modern studio at a cost of Rs. 1,00,000 for the Star of East Film Company started by his father. Located behind Globe theatre (present Roxy) the studio had glass roof and a laboratory attached. The company started off with a hopeful note when their first production *Bhishma pratigna* (1951) yielded Rs. 60000 in return for an investment of Rs. 12,000. And Prakasa enthusiastically went ahead and made three more films, each 6000' long and a number of topical shorts. These films of the Star of the East film Company got screened all over India, Burma and Sri Lanka with sub-titled

in Hindi, English Gujarathi, Tamil and Telugu, depending upon the region. However, this period of euphoria did not last long and in 1924 the company sank due to financial troubles—huge loans taken to build the three theatres, high rate of interest coupled with bad management.<sup>12</sup> The studio was taken over by the Official assignee, dismantled and sold in parts. Prakasa however, continued to struggle making films by hiring the equipment from the official assignee.<sup>13</sup> When the General Pictures Corporation, the company that really laid the foundation for film industry in South India was formed by the most dominant figure of the silent era, A. Narayanan, Prakasa joined them.

Ananthanarayanan Narayanan, born in Sivaganga in 1900 and graduated from Presidency college, Madras was a major force in shaping South Indian cinema in its infancy. Giving up his job in a Bombay bank, he entered the world of cinema when he joined Krishnadas Dwarakanath brothers of Bombay Films Distributors in 1923. He soon started off on his own and managed cinema houses in Calicut, Madurai and lastly in Madras. Having gained experience in the exhibition side also, in 1927 he started his own film distribution concern, The Exhibitor Film Services, supplying Indian and foreign films in South India. The next year he went on a tour of western countries to promote Indian films there, with a print of Imperiel Film *Anārkali* (1928).<sup>14</sup> This was a crucial point in his career for it was during this trip that he met Carl Laemmle in Hollywood and visited his Universal City studio complex there.<sup>15</sup> On his return to Madras, Narayanan, in the flush of enthusiasm inspired by his Hollywood stay, founded General Pictures Corporation in August 1929. This unit firmly established film-making as an industry in South India and produced the largest number of silent films. Going about this in a systematic way, Narayanan started this company aided by his own distribution system and facilities for exhibition, as a Public Limited concern and floated shares for it, giving it a stable legal and economic basis.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to being the single largest producer of silent films in South India, GPC played a more important role as the school for pioneer film-makers who later nursed and shaped vernacular cinema in different producing centres in South India.<sup>17</sup> While the two earlier companies had prepared the way for film-production, it was GPC that stabilised and assured a future for the fledgeling industry. Beginning with *Tarmapattinī* (1929) it produced 18 feature films but still had to face liquidation in 1933.

Before GPC, there had been spasmodic attempts at producing feature films. T. H. Huffton who had earlier made shorts for the Electric theatre, started Peninsular Company and made *Macāvātaram* (1927) but closed down after making two more films. Prakasa, after the fall of the

Star of the East Film company, tried to re-establish himself with the help of Moti Narayana Rao, a zamindar and founded Guarantee Picture Corporation, which made two films *Tasavatāram* and *Stage Girl* and then joined GPC.<sup>18</sup>

Associated Films founded by R. Padmanabhan in 1928, next only to GPC in getting cinema established in Madras, was another company that was founded at this time. With it were associated K. Subramanyam and the legendary Raja Sandow. Subramanyam was to make his mark later as a film-maker through productions like *Tyākapāmi* (1938, Tamil) while Raja Sandow already had the glamour of having dominated as a hero in Bombay. He directed and acted in a number of films made by this company including *Pēyum Peṇṇum* (1930) and *Pride of Hindustan* (1931). With his experience in Bombay cinema, he made films on contemporary themes, 'socials' as they were referred to. He also directed *Bhakta vatcalā* (1931) for national Theatre company, a concern which had a very short life.

Men who were trained in the various branches of film-making in Madras went out and founded companies in places like Bangalore and Hyderabad. K. V. Acharya, an associate of R. Prakasa founded Mysore Picture Corporation in Bangalore, which soon became another important film producing centre in South India. But the more durable production unit in Bangalore was Surya Film Company founded by H. R. Desai which began with *The Heart of the Rajan* and continued to make films with a steadiness that suggested sound management. At Nagercoil, a very unlikely place for a film-making company Chithra Art Productions made their first film *The Lost Child* and went on to make a few more films like *Mārtānta-varmā* (1931)<sup>19</sup>

The advent of talkie in Madras with the screening of *Melody of Love* in 1930 marked the beginning of the end of silent era.<sup>20</sup> Elphinstone Picture Palace was fitted with sound equipment and became Elphinstone talkies. Silent films continued to be made for sometime, till there was sufficient supply of talkie films and till all the cinema houses were re-equipped for sound. *Pākiya Chakkram* (1932) of H. R. Desai, the last silent film to be made in South India marked the end of an era in the history of Indian cinema.

#### *Beginnings of documentary and Newsreels*

When cinema shows became a regular feature in Madras, a few innovative minded men, fascinated by the new medium of moving pictures began to try their hands at producing them. Their early attempts at film-making, all actuality material, marked the beginning of cinema in South India. As early as 1907 T. H. Hutton produced a few shorts and screened

them in the Electric theatre which he was managing at that time. In 1921, Devashanka Ayyer, a clerk in the Railways, got interested in cinematography and sent his shorts to Pathe in United States to be included in their newsreel services. One of the memorable films of this amateur cinematographer was a 20-minute short, *The Funeral Procession of Gokale* shot in Calcutta. He also made a film on *Prince of Wales visit to India* and another on *Sivarathiri festival* in Bombay.<sup>21</sup>

All these attempts were coverages of important happenings, what were then referred to as 'review' films. But the first efforts towards documentary as we understand today, tackling a subject as objectively as possible through the medium of cinema, was attempted first in 1921 by Joseph A. David of Madras, a self-taught cinematographer. He made short films on typically Indian subjects like temple sculptures and festivals and sold them to companies in United States like the International Newsreel Corporation, Fox Newsreel Corporation and Pathe exchange and got paid a dollar for each foot of film accepted. These materials were incorporated in the documentaries of those companies, screened widely in the United States. David had a small laboratory in his house where he processed the films, but did not have the facility to print them. He sent the processed films with a summary of the content and dispatched them. They were printed in United States and provided with sub-titles. But David himself was not able to see any of his work projected.

Some of the films he made reveal excellent choice of subjects, like the *Carvings of Mahapalipuram* and *the Magic of Paddy*. In the second film, which was perhaps inspired by Phalke's short on *the growth of a pea plant* (1912), David was able to depict the growth of a paddy plant from a grain to a full plant ready for harvest in a matter of a few minutes, using time-lapse photography. His flair for natural history expressed itself in such shorts as *Bulbul, Mangoose and Monkeys* in a series called Indian pets and films on coconut palms and the touch-me-not plant. He also documented certain important events and made newsreels such as the 42nd National congress and the reception to the apostle delegate of India. When some fishermen from Chittagong got lost in the sea and landed in Madras, after being adrift for a number of days, David was there with his camera. Since none of his films on the culture of India and on nature topics got screened here there was no chance of David's work influencing south Indian cinema at all. But the foreign documentaries that were screened here with every show did give the Indian film-makers the idea to use the screen for propaganda.<sup>22</sup>

Prakasa who had a film producing unit and a chain of three cinema houses planned to run a regular newsreel and documentary service and as a beginning made shorts of some events in Madras, like the *Inauguration of Wellington Bridge* and the *Opening of the Royal Bath in*

*Madras*.<sup>23</sup> A missionary stationed at Tindivanam, Commissioned Prakasa, then working for his father's company to produce a documentary on the evangelistic work going on in that area, titled *The Catechist of Killarney* and this film got wide exposure in England while provoking protests at home.<sup>24</sup> The department of Public Health also engaged him to make a propaganda film on the prevention of cholera.

The British Government, meanwhile, realising the force of cinema, began using it for propaganda in India. W. Evans, a cinema expert who was invited by the Government to do a survey of Indian cinema had pointed out the potentiality of screen in a country like India, an aspect that was emphasized by the Advisory Publicity Committee which discussed the report.<sup>25</sup> The Government in order to forstall any effort on the part of Indian film-maker, began sponsoring production of newsreel films. But these attempts were mostly confined to unimaginative films, showing receptions given to governors and the 'at home' parties hosted by them; such material did not interest the audience. A good example was a 8000' film made for the Government by the Tata Publicity Cotporation, depicting the Duke of Cannought's tour of Indian. Madan and other such large distribution chains rejected this film.<sup>26</sup> However the Mopla rebellion, which had administered a rude shock to the complacent British government, offered a good subject for a documentary. The Government on its part had to explain the action taken against the moplas, both to Indian and English public and this was partly achieved by a film made on the subject, as an official record for the government. It was made primarily to be shown in England at the Wembly exhibition. Produced by Major Robinson of 75th Carnatic Infantry and photographed by H. Doveton of Calcutta, the film, in-addition to many beautiful scenes of Malabar, depicted refugees, convicted rebels and their weapons, the purpose being 'to show the brutal and ruthless character of the rebels!'<sup>27</sup>

A. Narayanan, who later emerged as a prolific film-maker, started his career by recording an actual event when he made the short *Indian National Congress at Gauhati* in 1927.<sup>28</sup> After the founding of GPC also he continued to make documentaries whenever he had an opportunity. When a major fire broke out in the Burma Oil Company tank in Madras and raged for hours, Narayanan recorded it and produced a short on the accident.<sup>29</sup> Commissioned by the Government he produced two documentaries for the Department of Public Health, *Maternity and Child welfare* and *Venereal diseases*.<sup>30</sup> Many private companies were also beginning to use the screen for advertising purposes; such was Dodge brothers of Addison Company who produced a film about the production of cars and the Imperiel Chemical Industries Ltd who had engaged Narayanan to make *Spirit of Agriculture* on the use of chemicals in farming, a lengthy documentary of 8000'.<sup>31</sup>



*Exhibition and Production of Silent films*

The commercial film shows of the early years were in the nature of variety performance, usually consisting of three or four shorts supplied by British, French and Danish companies. The screening of two American films, of universal company, *Lucille Love* and *Trey O' Hearts* (1914) in 1915 for the first time demonstrated to Indian audience that cinema could be, by depicting a human drama, a means of recreation.<sup>32</sup> Though by this time Indian films had begun arriving in the market, American and British films were proving more popular and it took about five years for Indian cinema industry to get established and be in a position to supply a steady stream of films to meet the demands of the few cinema houses which had started to screen exclusively Indian films. However, even after the middle of the 1920s when production began in Madras, the films screened in this province were mostly of American origin. The stunt films of William Desmond, for example, were a big favourite and serials - one film divided into several parts, screened in consecutive days - ran for a number of weeks. Serials featuring Edie Polo, like *the King of the Circus* and Elmo Lincoln's *Elmo the Mighty* were very popular.<sup>33</sup>

However, the situation on the exhibition side, was better than the production side. The number of permanent theatres which was 14 in 1921 went up to 43 in 1927 including 9 in Madras city. In addition there were 23 touring talkies operating in the province.<sup>34</sup> It was the touring talkies that took cinema to the rural areas. They camped in small towns where there was no permanent theatre and in festival spots. At times they would rent a hall but mostly used tents, moving from place to place in bullock carts, tents, benches, equipment and all. Two or three second hand western films which could be bought cheaply was all their repertoire and after showing them in one place for a month or two, with a single, hand-operated projector and carbide jet burners, (The absence of sound-track facilitated hand projection.), they moved on.<sup>35</sup> In some places, rice and other such articles had to be accepted of money for the sale of tickets and the articles thus collected at the gate were sold by the exhibitor in the weekly village market.<sup>36</sup>

Since the audience were preponderantly illiterate particularly in the rural areas, every cinema house, engaged a narrator who read the title cards aloud for the benefit of the audience and also spoke the lines for the main characters in the film. In addition he gave a running commentary on what was going on in the screen. Very often the performance of the narrator itself acquired an independent value and films which would have been otherwise unsuccessful were often saved by the narrators. The services of the more entertaining among them, the 'stars', were much sought after and some of them became actors when the talkies appeared.<sup>37</sup> But this practice of engaging narrators had an adverse

effect on the growth of cinematic medium, as aspect into which we will be going into later. Another device to tell the story was a small booklet containing a sequence by sequence synopsis and credits which was distributed to the audience when a film opened in big towns.

The irregular supply and poor quality of film coupled with poorer projection necessitated padding up the shows with extraneous entertainment features, like stage dances. The less attractive the material screened, the stronger was the emphasis on these extra programmes. The most common of these was the stage dance; groups of artists who had specialised in these dances went around the towns in which films were being screened. Some of them managed to elevate themselves to the status of actors; a well-known example of this kind of entry into films was that of Rathna Bai sisters.<sup>38</sup> Short dramas were also staged in the cinema houses by artists from the world of popular stage. The more innovative theatre-owners, like the one who announced 'boxing, shooting and other feats by the famous gun-box Jack', introduced varied side attractions along with the cinema shows.<sup>39</sup> All the permanent theatre had an orchestra which took its place in the pit in front of the screen and provided background music to the film.

The studios of the silent era were extremely simple affairs, just an enclosed space, without any roof. In the absence of artificial lighting the film-makers had to rely only on natural light, aided by reflectors and in a country like India, this was no problem.<sup>40</sup> More affluent studios like the Star of the East Company had glass roofs while the rest, controlled lighting with white and blue cloth, with holes in it, spread overhead to diffuse the light and reduce the glare. Though sets were often constructed, local shootings outdoors were resorted to more frequently as lighting conditions were similar both in the studio and outdoors. Narayanan when he was engaged in the production of his ambitious serial, *the Star of Mangrelia*, (1931) shot many sequences in the palace of the Raja of Venkatakirī, using his elephants and horses.<sup>41</sup> And for Prakasa Ginjee fort and environs was a favourite local for his mythologicals.<sup>42</sup> Each film company had its own laboratory in which the films were processed by hand-washing method. Sometimes even colouring (tinting) was done, to make the material more attractive and this effect was achieved by dipping the films in a bath of aniline colours and glicirine. Hand-colouring was also known though very rarely adopted.<sup>43</sup>

As the industry got stabilised in Madras, film journals, an important aid in the promotion of the industry and an instrument for the spread of filmic sub-culture, began appearing. S. K. Vasagam while managing a distribution company in Calcutta had started a journal, *Photoplay*, covering the happenings in the three film producing centres of

the country. After returning to Madras he started the first film journal of South India *Movie Mirror* an English monthly in 1928. It carried news regarding Indian and foreign film; being the only one of its kind, it invested the editor with considerable influence in shaping the industry. In fact, Vasagam soon emerged as an important force of the silent cinema, active in formation of new companies and importing talents from Bombay. His column 'Overheard in Broadway' was popular and much respected by the film world. This journal ran for three years and by the end of the silent era, Vasagam started 'the Amusement Weekly' which carried features both in Tamil and in English and lasted long into the talkie era.<sup>44</sup>

### Actors

One of the major problems that beset the efforts of the pioneer film-makers was the reluctance on the part of women to come and act in films. Witness after witness told the Cinematograph Enquiry Committee of 1927 of this difficulty and suggested a school for actors. Though by this time the popular stage had many female artists - there were even some all-female troupes - very few were prepared to enter cinema. The belief that exposure to the camera lense would impair one's health was strong enough to keep women away from cinema in the first few years.<sup>45</sup> Nataraja Mudaliar overcame this handicap by engaging an European lady for his film *Traupati Vastirāparaṇam* (1917).<sup>45</sup> The first few women who ventured into films were anglo-Indians; Marien Hill, who with the screen name Vilochana became the highest paid artist of the silent era and Mrs. Aelliot of GPC were some of the earliest female artists of South India.<sup>47</sup> Entry of women into films began through the dances which were put up as side attractions in the theatres. For example Ram Piyari who had been performing in the cinema houses later became a leading actress;<sup>48</sup> once the danceuses entered. Some women from popular stage also began arriving in films; such were T.P. Rajalakshmi and K.T. Rukmani. However this did not reduce the paucity of actresses and it was a common practice for one artist to play several roles in a single film or for men to play female roles.

As the stunt film was a very popular genre, proficiency in physical culture and acrobatics was a pre-requisite for men to enter films. Special training centres camp up to train men in stunt acts. The actors were greatly influenced by the exaggerated reports that appeared in the press about the life styles of stunt men like Edie Polo and there were 'Battling' Mani and Stunt Raju, the leading actors of the silent screen. But the actors were not given much importance in the system and this was a development which took place only decades later much to the detriment of a healthy growth of cinema. Even in advertisement their names were not given prominence or not mentioned at all. It was the director who was in total control of film-making. Actors playing main roles were engaged

for monthly wages. And some amateur drama clubs in Madras, like Immanuel club, supplied some actors and all the others were played by non-professionals. When they were not acting before the camera, all the actors had to do the other chorus of a studio, like make-up, assisting the cinematographer and even holding the reflectors.<sup>49</sup> In fact there was no specific allocation of work in these studios. In an emergency an actor would handle the camera and an accountant could play Lord Krishna. Out of this group of actors came a number of cinematographers and directors who sustained the talkie in South India in its infancy.<sup>50</sup> Though the popular stage was a favourite entertainment form and numerous drama companies were operating at this time, there was no appreciable movement of artists from the stage to the screen. One reason was that the screen artists were not paid much and employment was less secure than it was in the stage. With its emphasis on music, drama artistes who were trained singers could shine better on the stage while the screen preferred athletes and stunt men who could thrill the audience with daring acts. And the women who went into cinema were mainly dancers and not singers. As the story in a silent cinema is told in heavy mannered gestures and emphatic pantomime, stage actors were found unsuitable. Such an exodus was to begin only after the arrival of sound. Prior to that, the silent screen and the popular stage co-existed and flourished side-by-side.

#### *Impediments to the growth of cinema*

The apathy of the elitist class to the new entertainment was one of the main impediments that the nascent film industry had to contend with from the beginning. Being commercial in nature and sensational in content, the cinema, in the process of endearing itself to the masses got alienated from the elite for whom the main entertainment form was classical music concerts. And the stigma that was attached to popular stage and those working for it was extended to the world of cinema also. The witnesses who deposed before the Cinematograph Enquiry Committee repeatedly declared that they were either averse to watching films or that they had never seen one, that only the low class frequented cinema houses and that cinema was harmful to the community. Typical of this attitude was the statement of the President of the Corporation of Madras, G. Narayanaswamy Chetty before the committee, "I find the uncultured flock to the cinema. It could be said that 75% of cinema patrons are of the lower order." The Indian members of the board of film censors, Madras also adopted the same attitude<sup>51</sup>. Both the English and vernacular newspapers did not take much notice of the cinema and the little space that they gave for cinema concerned Hollywood. At a crucial stage in the growth of cinema, the intelligentsia, refused to be associated with it in any way. Instances of interaction between the intelligentsia and the cinema in other countries, like France where intellectuals associated themselves with cinema in the silent era itself and contributed to make

French cinema what it is today, clearly indicate the consequences of the negative attitude of the elite of Madras.

Nor was the attitude of the British Government very different. It was indifferent to the responsibilities and problems of Indian cinema and impervious to the economic implications of such a policy. The talk that there was of helping Indian cinema industry, at least in the twenties, was mainly aimed against the domination of American films *vis-a-vis* British films (euphemistically referred to as 'empire films' in official papers) of cinema houses in India.<sup>52</sup> Repeated pleas for protection of indigenous film industry, as it was done in Germany in the 1920s, went unheeded. To the British Government Indian cinema was merely a potential weapon in the hands of the nationalists. Even as early as 1922, W. Evans, the expert from England who had reported on Indian cinema had warned, 'serious consequences may ensue through the perversion of what is now the most powerful weapon in the armoury of the propagandist. The Advisory Publicity Committee, agreeing with the report, alerted the Government to the possibility of Indian cinema industry getting organised and producing 'films of highly undesirable type'.<sup>53</sup> The result was a further tightening of censorship.

The Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1927, headed by T. Rangachari, was set up mainly to review the censorship policy towards Indian films but all its recommendations, including a spirited plea for a liberal censorship policy were totally ignored. When the committee sat in various provincial capitals, it experienced the indifference of these governments towards the working of the committee and records it in its report. To improve the quality of Indian cinema, it recommended, with admirable foresight, the setting up of an institute for training men in film-making, a school for acting and a library to preserve films. That the British Government adopted a negative attitude only towards Indian cinema and not towards cinematic entertainment as such is clear from the fact that the British Film Institute and the National Film Archives of London were established quite early in the history of British cinema.<sup>54</sup>

It is during periods of national stress and social upheaval that purposeful film-making is motivated, as it happened in Russia after the Revolution and in Italy after the war. In India, though the political atmosphere was conducive for such a development, film-makers found that handling of social issues of the day was not tolerated. Mahatma Gandhi had made it clear that social reforms were closely related to the efforts towards nationhood and that there could be no real *swaraj* without social changes. Because issues like untouchability and emancipation of women formed part of the Gandhian programme these ideas were not permitted to be dealt with in films. It was not an

atmosphere in which a socially conscious cinema could grow. And the film-makers confined themselves to predominantly escapist variety and mythological films. (There were other reasons for their preoccupation with mythologicals. As the films were to be screened all over India, it was safer to handle puranic stories that were well known throughout-the country.) Attempts to break away from this pattern often met with difficulties. A good case in point is the film *Charka Sundari* began in 1932, which told the story of a little girl who supports her invalid father by spinning on a charka and making a living. When this film was under production, the censor board told the producers in Madras that it would not be permitted for exhibition and the film was given up.<sup>55</sup>

The sway of foreign films had a crippling effect on the fledgeling industry. American films could be hired for a much lower rate compared to Indian films and most of the cinema houses were in the hands of monopolistic concerns like Madans who preferred foreign films. Therefore local film-makers found it difficult to find exhibitors for their films. They could not invest large sums of money in the construction of sets and other such works as the returns would be low, a problem aggravated by the absence of proper financing. In the film *Kōvalaṅ* (1929) scenes of *Pūmpukār*, the pre-medieval port of Tamilnadu, were shot in Madras harbour with modern steamers and suit-clad westerners at the background.<sup>56</sup>

There were other handicaps also; because all the film were shot in natural light, in the absence of arc lamps, there had to be a certain amount of sacrifice in quality of photography. Though there were trained technicians in lighting and photography, they could not use artificial lighting because the electric corporation was not in a position to supply the voltage needed to operate arc lamps. The Cinematograph Committee, commenting on the quality of Indian silent films, recorded, 'They are defective both artistically and technically. Plots and sceneries are indifferent and lack originality. The acting is apt to be wooden and inexpressive. Episodes are long drawn so that action is slow. The multiplicity of captions accentuates the slowness of action'.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Evolution of Cinematic Vocabulary*

It is in the silent phase of a cinema that cinematic vocabulary is established with a firm basis, facilitating further evolution, according to the creative abilities of the film-makers and therefore this stage is crucial for the growth of any cinema. In the absence of sound, the film-maker has to depend entirely on visuals and in this situation a powerful cinematic vocabulary could be developed. The works of D. W. Griffith mark this phase of American cinema. In the trial episode of the film *Intolerance* (1916, US), he introduced an extreme close-up of Mae Marsh's

clasped hands, opening and closing, to suggest the agitation in her mind at that critical moment in the trial. While thus trying to tell a story through a new medium, the film-maker is forced to evolve a syntax of cinema. To cite a recent example, the underground film-makers of United States, who cannot afford sound when they begin it all, rely only on visuals and this is a very good way to learn film vocabulary. Once they pass this stage and are in a position to pay for sound track, the product is a powerful cinema, at times threatening the very establishment at Hollywood.

But such a development never came about in South Indian cinema one of the main reasons for this was the fact that the films made in the silent era were mostly mythologicals. Through wandering minstrels, *kālatcepam bhagavathars*,<sup>58</sup> popular stage, *terukūttu* performances and through stories learnt at mother's lap, the audience were familiar with all the mythological episodes. When these subjects were taken up, the film-maker didnot have the necessity to device ways of telling the story as he was only giving something that was already known to the viewers, only through a different medium. Therefore there was limited scope for cinematic vocabulary to develop. When Rama followed the golden deer, on the screen, at the request of Sita, the audience knew very well that it was actually Marisa in the form of a deer and that it was part of *Rāvaṇā's* dark design to kidnap Sita. This knowledge simplified the task of the film-maker and he didnot have to strain his imagination to find out ways of telling a story through cinema.

As there were attempts to cover large portions of an epic in a single film, many sequences had to be skipped so as to be able to depict the episode in full and filling these gaps by lengthy narrations through title cards was resorted to. This over-reliance on titles, amounting to misuse, was a retarding factor in the growth of narrative film technique. Even though there were great many stories in mythologies, only a few well-known episodes were repeatedly taken up for filming, resulting in a number of remakes. In four years there were 4 films that told the story of Rama and another 4 that related to Pandavas excile. The same principle operated when dramas which had been popular on the stage over a number of years were filmed, like *Nantaṇār* and *Kōvalaṇ*, of which two versions of each came out as films.

The silent cinema was never allowed to be remain silent; there were the loquacious narrators. In trying to overcome the inability of the audience to read the title cards, the narrator prevented the full-play of the exclusive properties and powers of cinema. In an exclusively visual medium, verbal element was brought in as a support. Therefore the scope

for the language peculiar to cinema to develop was severely restricted and the new medium remained retarded<sup>59</sup>.

### *Influences at work*

Efforts to understand the past of a cinema, in order to be able to come into grips with its present, lead us on to the various influences which had an effect on the evolution of that cinema. Delienation of these different strands of influences would greatly facilitate comprehension of the present character of cinema. But such a delienation has only to be accepted as an academic device, as an aid to bring them in proper focus and not as an implication that there was no overlapping of the influences.

From among the tangle of influences over South Indian cinema, the one that stands out is of course Hollywood the home of commercial cinema. Most of the films screened in India were from America and those involved in the production of films here, looked up to the place of its origin for models on which they could base their own works. Though often the content of films made here varied, the format and style were typically American. Even the practice of giving double titles was followed here as for instance *Kōvalaṅṅ* or the 'Fatal Anklet' (1929) The audience who had been fed only on American films for more than a decade developed a penchant for that kind of cinematic entertainment and Indian film-makers found it safer and easier to follow this already popular format. The emphasis on gymnastics and stunt sequences was a recognition of this fact. Kissing sequences and belly-dances that were quite common in South Indian films were a direct result of Hollywood influence. Chases and fights were closely patterned after American films. The two dominant figures of the silent screen, A. Narayanan and R. Prakasa, had both been very much influenced by western films and film-makers.

Two forms of entertainment that were popular in the early twenties, *katā kālatacēpam* a musical narration of religious stories and dramas considerably influenced film-making. While the subject matter of *Kālatacēpams* were exclusively mythological, the dramas put up by commercial troupes included folklore, historicals and even an occasional contemporary theme. Certain episodes from the epics, standardised in song-form by writers like Sankara Das Swamigal were being staged by a number of companies. When cinema came on the scene, the tendency was to cash in on something that had already been popular rather than risk handling a totally new subject in an equally new medium. The stories handled by *kālatacēpam* minstrels and the drama companies formed the grist to the mill of the film-maker; such were Nataraja Mūḍaliyar's *Kiṅkaṅvātam* (1916) and Narayanan's *Pavalakoṭi* (1931). The long-drawn title cards told the story, a role played by songs in the dramas of the day. The painted back-drops used in studios and the stage-dances in cinema houses



were symptomatic of the influence of the stage on the screen. This reflection was partly responsible for the aversion against cinema that the educated were so keen to flaunt. However, it must be clarified that the effect of the stage on cinema was much deeper after the arrival of sound because the talkie could reproduce effectively the musical dramas while the silent screen could not.

Films frequently featured *kanjin* dances, which had been popular in the drama troupes. This type of dance, a degenerate form of the courtesan dances of Moghul period, had found its way to South Indian stage through Marathi drama companies that toured in this area. Bharatha Natyam was unknown in the silent screen as public performances of this classical form was to begin only by 1935.

The interaction between Madras and the other two film-producing centres in the country, Bombay and Calcutta aided the growth of cinema in South India. By 1920, the industry in these centres had got established and was able to flood the market with feature films. Bulk of the Indian film screened in the South were from Bombay; In 1921 for example, 80 films were released in Bombay all of which were screened in Madras. Even after studios came up in Madras, most of the Indian films shown continued to come from Bombay. In addition to films that often served as models, Bombay and Calcutta supplied technicians, many of whom settled in Madras and played important roles in the industry's growth. When GPC was started, Narayanan brought two cinematographers from Calcutta, Dhiren Dey and Sailen Bose; they trained local men who later facilitated new film-making units to come up. Associated Films, a close rival of GPC, recruited technicians, including some tailors from Bombay and got Bhawe and E. G. Gokte to handle the camera. Some of the leading artistes of Madras, like Y. V. Rao had had earlier training in Bombay.

But the prominent indication of this interaction between film-producing centres is the career of Pudukottai born P. J. Raja Sandow; he got interested in physical culture, became a gymnast and proceeded to Bombay in search of oppertunities in the world of cinema. Starting as an actor, he made a name in films like *Viera Bhimsen* (1923) and soon was in great demand as a lead artist, a position from which he dominated the Bombay screen for a few years. When R. Padmanabhan and S. K. Vasagam were in Bombay recruiting men fer the new company, they persuaded Raja Sandow to come and work as a director. Lured by the scope of becoming a film-maker. Raja Sandow returned to Madras, bringing with him valuable experience and some of his earlier associates to work in his film. One such was Hiroji who acted in Sandow's *Orphan Daughter* (1931).<sup>80</sup> All these years great many of the films made

in Madras had been merely remakes of the earlier mythologicals from Bombay, like *Pāṇṭava Akṣātāvūcam* (1930) which was patterned after *Pāṇṭavas* (1925, Bombay). Attempting to reverse this trend, Raja Sandow began to make socials and advertised his films as 'Don't miss to see your own picture.'<sup>61</sup> He arrived at a clever compromise between the preference of the audience for mythologicals and his own bias for contemporary themes. He produced modern versions of mythological stories; such was *Rājēsvari* (1930), an adaptation of the story of *Nallataṅkāl*.

### *Reflections of social concern*

Cinema, a popular entertainment form dependent upon the patronage of masses for its survival reflects the social and political milieu of the day, even if dimly. While this could be said of all art forms in the case of cinema, with its universality of appeal, it is all the more true. At this time, Non-cooperation and Khilafat movements had brought about a political awakening in South India and Gandhi had emerged as a national leader, unifying nationalistic forces to endow the struggle for freedom with momentum. Emphasizing the need for social reforms, he had incorporated programmes like temperance in his plan of action. The silent cinema, though it did not have any pretensions to ideological or political content certainly had clear overtones of political consciousness.

The tendency of cinema of any nation thus play the role of a social historian has been duly acknowledged by film theoreticians. This was evident even in the first film on a contemporary theme made in South India; Narayanan's *Tarmapatiṇi* (1929) which had a sequence explaining how addiction to alcoholic drinks could ruin domestic peace. This set the tone for temperance propaganda in films which assumed the proportions of an obsession in later years. In fact in all the social films there was an obligatory anti-drinking scene. Raja Sandow's *Nantaṅār or the Elevation of the Downtrodden* (1930), an adaptation of the drama *Nantaṅ Carittiram* of Poet Gopalakrishna Bharathi, himself a great protagonist for the removal of untouchability, told the story of Nandan, a low caste devotee of Siva and a loyal servant of a brahmin land-lord. He undergoes a lot of suffering before he could fulfil his ambition of worshipping Siva at Chidambaram. *Nantaṅ* preaches against superstition and alcoholic drinks and lead his co-farm workers towards clean life. The landlord, observing the result of *Nantaṅ's* evangelistic work, has a change of heart and accepts the untouchable farm labourer as his religious mentor.<sup>62</sup>

Social injustice to women was another theme that was often touched upon in films with contemporary stories. By this time a number of reformist films had already been released in Bombay, like *Social Pirates* (1925). Sandow's own *Orphan Daughter* (1930) produced in Madras was about a girl who wants to marry the man she loves and is therefore

forsaken by her angry father; she suffers hardships and is eventually married to her man. This incidentally was one of the earliest apologies for marriage by one's own choice, in South Indian films. Another film of Sandow *Rāiēsvari* (1931), by telling the story of a woman who is driven to suicide by the ill-treatment meted out to her by in-laws, focussed attention on the plight of women in the society.

Daniel Lerner in his *The Passing of traditional Society*, a study of mass media in Middle East, has brought out the role played by films as an agency for modernisation.<sup>62</sup> When cinema appeared in South India by the turn of this century, also, it began playing a similar role. Cinema being a non-printed media, it bypasses the need for literacy on the part of the audience and opens up a new world of vicarious experiences to large masses of people whose span of experiences is severely limited by the restrictions on physical travel. In that way, it influenced public opinion on matters relating to war, nationalism and social reforms in a way as no other medium has done. This process, set in motion during the silent days in South India, continues to the present day in a much more ramified form.

#### NOTES

I wish to record my gratitude to the Tamilnadu Council of Historical Research. This paper was prepared while engaged in a two-year Research Project relating to cinema under a Fellowship from the Council.

1. A researcher engaged in a study of silent cinema is severely handicapped by the lack of original material and therefore the end product has necessarily to be incomplete. The major handicap is of course the virtual non-existence of primary material, like films, to work with. Out of nearly 67 feature films and about 38 known documentary titles, only one film, *Māntāvarman* has survived. There was no conscious effort at preservation. Films, after their initial one or two week run were handed over to the touring units who, by the time they were through with it, had totally destroyed the films by bad and constant handling. When film companies were liquidated, the films were sold as junk to dealers who made a little money by extracting silver from the nitrate content in the film. Nitrate stock which was used often decomposed in hot weather. Even still photographs of the period is hard to come by. This study was done only

on the basis of interviews with actors, actresses, cinematographers and other technicians who were involved in film-making in the silent era, newspaper files, back-numbers of magazines and governmental reports. I am particularly thankful to T.K. Seetharaman, who was closely associated with General Pictures Corporation, for the discussion I had with him and for the contacts he gave. But for this help the paper would have been still more incomplete.

2. S. Natarajan, *A Century of Social Reform in India*, New Delhi 1959, p. 99-145.
3. Eugene F. Irschick, *Nationalism and Anti-Nationalistic Politics in Tamilnadu in the 1930s*. Paper read at the Nehru Memorial Museum, New Delhi 1971 (mimeographed).
4. Eric Barnouw & S. Krishnaswamy, *Indian film*, Columbia University, 1963, p. 3.
5. *Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927-1928*. (Hereafter referred to as ICC), Evidence Vol. III, p. 359-374.
6. Interview with C.B. ('Flash') Devaraj (Film journalist) 28-9-1975 Madras.
7. *Souvenir of Vincent's Light House*, Coimbatore 1946.

8. *Indian Films, Diamond Jubilee* (1919-1972), Special Number of *Flash*.
9. 'Interview with R. Nataraja Mudaliar', *Cittirālaya*, (Tamil Fortnightly film journal) 5-6-1970, Madras.
10. Marudappa Moopanan, an enterprising photographer from Tanjavur, journeyed to England to learn film techniques and there shot a short film covering the coronation of King George V in November, 1911. He screened this film in number of touring talkies back in Madras. He could not raise money to make films and joined India Film Company when it was started by R. Nataraja Mudaliar. T.B. Nataraja Pillai, *Cinemāvin Tēn-pāṭṭu Varalāṭu* (History of South Indian Cinema, Tamil) Thanjavur, 1958, p. 3-4.
11. T.B. Nataraja Pillai, p. 6.
12. ICC, Vol. III, p. 135-147.
13. ICC, Vol. III, p. 155-160.
14. Interview with T. R. Varadarajan, 19-4-1976, Madras. He worked as an assistant to A. Narayanan in GPC.
15. Narayanan also met Cecil B. DeMille and was a guest at 'Pickfair' the Beverly Hills mansion of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. He got to know John Barrymore there. The actor later paid a visit to Madras and Narayanan accompanied him to Palghat (Kerala) where Barrymore received ayurvedic treatment for arthritic. When R. J. Flaherty, the famous documentalist from America, came to India to make *Elephant Boy*, it was Narayanan who accompanied him to Mysore and gave him the necessary contacts.  
Interview with Dr. N. Kalavathy, daughter of A. Narayanan. 25-4-1976 Madras.
16. *Hindu* (English daily, Madras) 23-5-1930.
17. Number of directors who greatly contributed to the growth of talkies in different languages had had training in GPC; For example C Pullaiya (Telugu), Y.V. Rao (Cannarese) and T. Prakasa (Tamil).
18. P.S. Vasān, *Tamil Talkie Pramukarkaḷ*, (Celebrities in Tamil Cinema) Madras, 1937, p. 27.
19. Interview with C. V. V. Nayagam 27-5-1975 Kotagiri. He played the role of Sri Padmanabhan Thambi, the villain, in *Mārtanḍavarman*.
20. *Hindu* 3-5-1930.
21. ICC, Vol. III p. 345-346.
22. ICC, Vol. III, p. 322-332
23. ICC, Vol. III, p. 141.
24. ICC, Vol. III, p. 307.
25. Letter No. 1237 Law (General) 12-5-1922 (Tamilnadu Archives hereafter referred to as TA).
26. ICC, Vol. III, p. 347.
27. Mail (English Daily, Madras) 17-12-1921.
28. G.O. No. 2329 Law (General) 27-7-1927 (TA)
29. Interview with T. S. Muthuswamy 25-4-1976 Madras. He was secretary to A. Narayanan during the GPC days.
30. *Flash*, special number 1972 Madras.
31. This appears to be one of the earliest advertisement films made in South India.
32. ICC, Vol. III, p. 338.
33. *Mail*, 29-10-1921.  
Biographies of Hollywood stars like Edie Polo and Elmo Lincoln were published in Tamil, like L. Ananthaiyer's *Edie Polo*, Madras 1922. There were even fan clubs for these stars.
34. ICC, Report Volume, p. 179.
35. ICC, Report Volume, p. 25.
36. Interview with C.B. ('Flash') Devaraj.
37. Interview with A.T. Krishnaswamy, Film Director 17-4-1976 Madras. This practice of engaging narrators was in vogue in Japan also and they were called 'explainers'. They had formed themselves into a guild which was powerful enough to delay the appearance of talkie in Japan. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* London 1969 p. 119.
38. Rathna Bai and Kamala Bai (different from the Rathnabai sisters of the talkie days.) *Kuṇṭūci* (Monthly Madras) May 1963.
39. *Hindu* 10-4-1931.
40. The situation in Bombay was different. Even as early as 1923 artificial lights were used, beginning with the film *Sinhagad* of Boburao Painter. Isak Mujwar, *Maharashtra Birthplace of Indian Film Industry* Bombay 1965, p. 22.
41. *Hindu* 28-11-1931.
42. Interview with M.P. Rathnam, Madras 2-7-1975 He was an editor with Prakasa.
43. Interview with T.K. Rajaram. 28-4-1976. He worked as a technician in GPC laboratory.

44. Interview with S.K. Vasagam 26-7-1976 Madras.
45. Interview with J. Susheela Devi 9. 5. 1976 She was the lead artiste for many of GPC' and Associated Film movies. Against recording one's voice for gramophone also there was similar beliefs in the 1920s. It was thought that one would loose the quality of his voice. Even S.G. Kittappa refuse to sing for gramophone records when he was asked. Later, however, he agreed.  
Akkur Ananthachariar *Sriman S.G. Kittappa*, 1934, Madras, p. 50.
46. 'Reminiscences of R. Nataraja Mudaliar', *Mail*, 25-12-1936.
47. Interview with T.K. Seetharam 27-4-1976.  
He was associated with GPC in the early years.
48. *Tamil Talkie Pramukarkaḷ*, p. 37.
49. Interview with Mangudi R. Durairaju aiyer 19-4-1976. He was an actor in Associated Films and had played lead role in *Nantaṅār or the Elevation of the downtrodden* (1930).
50. Ellappan, an actor at Associated Films, worked as an assistant to the cinematographer became a cinematographer himself. Till 1973 he worked as Director of Photography in Gemini studios. P.V. Rao and Y.V. Rao, both starting as actors, became film directors.
51. ICC, Vol. III, p. 470.
52. S.T. Baskaran, *Film Censorship and Political Control in British India: 1914-1945*. Transaction of the Indian History Congress, 36th session, Aligarh 1975.
53. W. Evans, 'Cinema Publicity in India 1921' contained in Letter No. 1237 Law (General) 12-5-1922. (TA).
54. There is a striking pallel to similar treatment by Britain to the cinema industry in a colony. In Australia a significant beginning was made in film-making and by the middle of the 1920s nearly 250 feature films were made. But the infant industry soon had to contend with American and British films that were imported in large numbers. Cry for protection of indigenous films went up and The Royat Commission was set up to suggest measures to protect the industry. But nothing came out of this exercise and the silent cinema in Australia slowly got strangled out of existence.  
\*Interview: John Murry', *Cinema Journal*, Bombay, 23-4-1976.
55. G. O. No. 2366 Law (General) 10-6-1931. (TA)
56. Interview with Chitti Sundararajan Tamil writer) 28-4-1975 Madras.
57. ICC, Report Volume, p. 35.
58. *Kālatcēpam* muscial narration of mythological episodes performed by vocalists, called *bhāgavatar* is usually held in the halls attached to temples. Beginning late in the evening it will last for two or three hours.
59. This tendency to resort to uncinematic practices in telling a story on the screen persisted long into the talkie era, assuming different forms in different periods. In the early talkies, a film often opened with lengthy titles, giving a long preamble to establish the background for the story. This could be seen in *Maruṭa Nāṭṭu Iḷavaraci* (1950). The persistence of this characteristics even now is revealed when characters in a film narrate certain sequences, which normally should have been shown visually, in lengthy monologues.
60. *Hindu* 22-5-1931.
61. *Hindu* 16-5-1930.
62. Daniel Lerner. *The Passing of Traditional Society*, US. 1958,