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THESPIAN SIVAJI GANESAN AND HIS PROMINENT TAMIL MOVIES- A BIRD EYE'S VIEW



Maruthumohan

EARLY DAYS

Sivaji Ganesan fore fathers were belonged to Vettaithidal, near Mannargudi, Tanjore District.¹ Since his father Chinnaya Mandrayar was an employee in Southern Railway, he was settled at Villupuram with his mother Rajamani Ammal. Sivaji Ganesan born on 1st October 1928 at Villupuram and on that day his father was arrested by British when he tried to place dynamite for a train that carried British soldiers. He was imprisoned for seven years that made his mother with her four boys shifted to Trichy under the care her father Chinnasamy Kalingarayar who also worked in Railways.² Sivaji's residential place is existing even today at Sangliyandapuram.

When Shivaji was studying his 3rd std in Ponniah School (run by a Christian Mission), he happened to watch 'Kambalathar Koothu' that was about the life of Veerapandiya Kattabomman' the famous warrior who fought against British in the Eighteenth Century. In those days, Kattabomman's life was enacted by many small

ABSTRACT

This paper reveals the life of an renowned actor of Tamil Nadu in the field of art who completely dedicated his life for acting and reached zenith of glory in the field of cinema and theatre. He is none other than Nadigal Thilagam Sivaji Ganesan. He was an actor with brilliant histrionic talent and it was to the filed of cinema and theatre that he dedicated himself in totality for six decades. His contribution and legacy to the world of theatre and film has been tremendous.

KEYWORDS : Sivaji Ganesan, E.V.Ramasami, C.N. Annadurai, M.Karunanidhi, Bhim Singh, Manohara, Parasakthi, Theatre, Cinema, Film, Ananda Vikatan

Short Profile

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drama troupes as a play in Tamil Nadu that called, 'Kambalathar koothu'. On watching this play regularly Sivaji Ganesan started dreaming of becoming an actor and that too to act as Kattabomman. This dream brought an end to his studies and he joined a drama troupe that was camping at Trichy called, 'Madurai Shri Bala Gana Sabha' under the heads of 'Yadhartham' Ponnusamy and another called 'Vathiyar' Chinna Ponnusamy Padai-

yachi.³

After joining the troupe, Shivaji found 'KaKa' Radhakrishnan who (acted in 'Thevar Magan') was one of his street friends. On seeing him Ganesan immediately requested him not to disclose about his family to the management of the troupe as he informed them as an orphan.⁴

From Trichy the drama company shifted their camp to Dindugul where his drama life started. In the company, the rules and regulations were strict. It was functioning as Gurukulam of yesteryears.

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The day schedule start by 7 a.m. in the morning, then bathe followed by prayers. Then the first session called for singing and dancing and this followed by rehearsal for dialogues for that day's play. He was trained well to sing and dance as per the *sastras*. He had acquired every detail to the theatre.⁵ The rules followed in the troupe were strict in such a way that Ganesan was not permitted to go home for attending the death of his two brothers in a short span. The reason was Sivaji Ganesan was able to memorise the dialogues of the entire play. Out of 250 members of the drama company, if any of the actors unable to do their role either on health ground or any other reason the master was able to manage the play with Sivaji Ganesan with different make ups. In Ramayana drama, Sivaji Ganesan was able to play two male and two female characters viz., Bharatha, Indrajit, Sita and Soorpanaka. By this opportunity, he was able to improve his histrionic abilities and he was respected much by the management. Though he himself developed his acting capacity, by playing four characters at the cost of his own sentiment feelings.⁶

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Within ten days after reaching Dindugul, he was able to learnt everything taught by the Chinna Ponnusamy and got the permission of his master to appear for the first time on the stage as Sita role in the Ramayana. He was appreciated by his master. From that day onwards, his career took off with better and better roles.⁷

Association with Dravidian Movement Leaders

When Ponnusamy troupe was camped at Paramakudi, Actor Radha joined and played villain roles and Sivaji Ganesan played female roles. At later period, Actor Radha had started his own drama troupe called 'Saraswathi Gnana Sabha' and convinced Sivaji to join with him. When the Saraswathi Gnana Saha was staging the dramas like, '*Lakshmikanthan*', '*Vimala*', '*Vidhavaiyin Kanneer*', its office was functioning in the building belonged to E.V.Ramasamy. Hence, Sivaji

Ganesan was able to got introduced to E.V.Ramasamy, C.N. Annadurai, E.V.K. Sampath, M.Karunandihi, the feontline line leaders of Self Respect Movement. Also Sivaji moved with the famous Tamil Actors, N.S.Krishnan, K . R . R a m a s a m y , S . S . R a j e n d r a n , D.V.Narayanasamy,⁸

Dravidian Movement and Tamil Cinema

When British was ruling India, Indian National Congress Party encouraged the stage and cinema actors to involve national movement with intention to cultivate patriotic feelings to the rural masses. But after independence, the Congress government failed to extend their patronage towards stage and Cinema actors. This indifferent attitude of the Congress , a colossal blunder to the party, leading to loss of political power.

But C.N. Annadurai had cleverly used stage and cinema as media to propagate the policies of Self Respect Movement along with print media. C.N. Annadurai wrote plays like "*Chandrodhayam*", "*Velaikkari*", "*Ore Iravu*", and "*Nallathambi*" which became popular. In 1946, Dravida Kazhagam organaised the Seventh Self Respect Conference in Madras, . Annadurai had written a play titled "*Sivaji Kanda Indhu Rajyam*" to be staged for the conference. In this play, Annadurai played a priest role and M.G.Ramachandran had been allotted a leading role but he declined to act for his own reasons. That role was given to Ganesan. Sivaji Ganesan proved his memorising ability to Annadurai by way of memorizing 90 pages of dialogues within 6 hours.⁹ E.V.Ramasamy who normally disliked stage plays and cinemas highly impressed by the performance of Ganesan and said that the young actor should be called 'Sivaji' Ganesan and this title endured to him.

Super Star of Tamil Cinema

During end of 1940s a popular drama by "*Parasakthi*" penned by Pavalar Sundaram was enacted by Devi Nataka Sabha. This drama was

continuously staged for eighteen weeks.¹⁰ At that time, Sivaji Ganesan was popular in theatre plays like "*vidhi*", "*Enn Thangai*", "*Noorjahan*". His acting skill and dialogue delivery style attracted Perumal, the proprietor of National Theatre, Vellore. Perumal was a business associate with AVM Studios for the latter's movies. Perumal had suggested to Meyyappa Chettiar of AVM to start a joint venture by floating a new company, 'National Pictures' in production of "*Parasakthi*" drama into a movie. On getting the acceptance from the Chettiar, Perumal initially fixed A.S.A.Samy and Thiruvarur Thangarasu as Director and Script Writer respectively for '*Parasakthi*'. But it was changed to duo Krishnan - Panju for Direction and M. Karunanidhi for Script and dialogue.¹¹

Make-up test for "*Parasakthi*" was held at AVM and shooting was carried out for 2 years. Ganesan was paid Rs.250 per month for that period. As the film progressed, lot of objections came from the side of Sound Engineers about the flaw in dialogue delivery of Ganesan. Neelakandan (Director) also found that acting also not good as expected.¹² Meyyappa Chettiar called Perumal and advised not to take risk with new face and to go for K.R.Ramasamy or T.R.Mahalingam who were popular actors at that time.¹³ In spite of all the difficulties, Perumal did not change his mind and the film was released on 17th October, 1952 that became a trend setter for dialogue and acting performance of Sivaji Ganesan made him a Super Star overnight.¹⁴

"*Parasakthi*" was a turning point in Tamil Cinema as it challenged the social taboos. Since the film was trying to portray Brahmins in poor light and abused the Hindu customs and religious practices, strong protests came from the quarters of Hindu orthodoxy.¹⁵ Then Chief Minister of Madras, Rajaji was upset and requested the Government of India to ban this movie.¹⁶ But Srinivasan, the then Censor Board Officer, had allowed the film to be screened with his remarks that the film contains nothing and the film need not be banned.¹⁷

At this time, Tamil Nadu politics was revolving around E.V.Ramasamy the founder of Dravidar Kazhagam. Due to the difference of opinion with E.V.Ramasamy, C.N. Annadurai with his supporters was able to form a new political party called "Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam" shortly called as DMK.

"*Parasakthi*" became a silver jubilee hit film (ran for 200 days) was all time high grosser and is regarded as the first significant film which was utilized by the Dravidian Movement to use as media for propaganda. Sivaji Ganesan was compares with Spencer Tracy, the Hollywood actor for his extraordinary acting.¹⁸

"*Manohara*" - Another milestone:

"*Manohara*" was another milestone for Sivaji Ganesan as well as for the Tamil Cinema Industry. The original story written as drama by Pammal Sambantha Mudaliar. The 1954 film version of this story earned its place in the hall of fame for its brilliant Tamil dialogue written by M. Karunanidhi and powerful acting by Sivaji Ganesan and Kannambal. The flowing dialogues and alternative cadenzas of words helped "*Manohara*" to be a box office success and a cult of classic film.¹⁹ First time in the advertisement of this movie, M. Karunanidhi name appeared with prefix title '*Kalignar*'.²⁰

"*Manohara*" was produced by Soma sundaram (Jupiter Pictures) and directed by L.V.Prasad. Sivaji Ganesan had shown his incomparable talent in delivery of dialogue both in Tamil and Telugu in single shot in many scenes especially in court scene and climax scenes.²¹

The way in which those scenes shot by the Director must be explained in detail. While taking the court scene, at first the lengthy dialogue in Tamil was shot and immediately the same dialogue in Telegu version (written in Tamil) spoken by Sivaji Ganesan was shot which showed Sivaji Ganesan as a born Telugu man. Both the dialogues were single shots. Such an extraordinary memory power and dialogue delivery skill spoken by Sivaji Ganesan in both

and Tamil languages event astonished the Director L.V.Prasad²² who viewed that "*This talent of Sivaji was not found with any other actors in the world*".

Sivaji Ganesan as Anti-Hero

Super Star Sivaji Ganesan acted in some of the Anti-Hero roles and proved himself that he never bothered about the image but considered this as a way to expose his acting talent. He had unerring confidence in his ability as an actor and it is power to draw audiences.²³ He had done anti-hero characters in the following movies after "*Parasakthi*" (1952), "*Thirumbipaar*" (1953), "*Andhanaal*", (1954) "*Thulivisham*" (1954), "*Koondukili*" (1954), "*Penninperumai*" (1956), and finally in "*Rangon Radha*" (1956).²⁴

Play within A Play

In films with contemporary social themes the film experts of the industry introduced historic plays as part of the stage scenes, presumably to find a place for super dialogues. Sivaji Ganesan had acted many plays within many films during 1950 to 1960.²⁵ In *Anbu.*, (1953) he acted as Othello (Shakespeare's Character). In *Illara Jyothi*, (1954), he acted as Prince Salim, dialogue written by Kannadasan,²⁶ In *Naanpettra Selvam*, (1956), he played a dual role of Nakkiran and Lord Siva which was dialogued by A.P.Nagarajan, In *Raja Rani* (1956), he acted in roles as Cheran Senguttuvan and Socrates. These two plays were penned by M. Karunanidhi. In these two plays, the first was written with intention to highlight the golden era of Tamilians during the Sangam Age. His role of Socrates fully glorified E.V.Ramasamy's way of life and his policies.²⁷ In the movies of *Annaiyin Anai* (1958), Sivaji Ganesan acted as Emperor Asoka, dialogued by Murasoli Maran.²⁸ In 1959, Sivaji Ganesan acted as Porkai Pandian in *Allipettra Pillai*, scripted by A.P.Nagarajan.²⁹ In *Ratta Thilagam*, (1963), again Sivaji acted as Othello.³⁰ In *Raman Ethanai Ramanadi*, (1970), he acted as Sivaji Maharaj. In *Yengiruntho Vanthan*, (1970), Sivaji

acted as Epic Hero Dhusyanth. In the film *Sorgam*, (1970), he acted as Roman Emperor Julius Caesar. In *Rajapart Rangadurai*, (1973) Sivaji acted Freedom Fighters Kodi Katha Kumaran as well as Bhagat Singh.³¹

First Film with local Slang

In the film, *Makkalai Pettra Maharasi*, (1957), Sivaji Ganesan delivered dialogue in the 'Kongu' Tamil and in that film Sivaji Ganesan scored well. This is the first film came with local slang in Tamil Cinema industry.³²

Sivaji Ganesan in Double, Triple and Multiple Roles

Though Sivaji Ganesan acted as Lord Siva and Nakkirar in *Naan Pettra Selvam* for a play with in a play, he acted in dual role in *Uthama puthiran*, (1958). In this movie he had just changed his facial expressions and body languages for two roles without any special make up.³³ In the film *Bale Pandya*, (1962), he acted in three roles giving different voice modulation, different body languages. Sivaji Ganesan completed this film within eleven days probably it should be the world record.³⁴

In the film, *Navaratiri*, (1964), Sivaji Ganesan acted in nine roles. When Sivaji Ganesan was in drama field, a drama by name *Dambachari* was played by Balamani troupe. Actor Samanna Iyer was able to play eleven roles in this drama.³⁵ Sivaji Ganesan as a drama artist watched this drama and he developed a passion to do different roles with different characters in one film that resulted in to *Navaratiri*, (1964). This movie was produced, scripted and directed by A.P.Nagarajan.³⁶ Sivaji Ganesan scored well in nine varieties of emotions Love, Laughter, Kind-heartedness, Anger, Courage, Fear, Disgust, Wonder and Peace exhibited by a human being.³⁷ This was the first film in which the hero played nine different roles convincingly and impressed everyone. Despite the lack of make up technology, Sivaji attempted and made the film a

landmark.³⁸

The film, *Thiruvilyadal*, (1965) was produced, scripted and directed by A.P. Nagarajan, which covered four stories out of 64 Nayanmar stories in the Thiruvilayadal Puranam. It was Sivaji Ganesan who acted in a trend setter movie *Parasakthi* in 1952 from the devotional themes to social stories, and after 13 years he did a movie which reversed the industry from social to devotional themes.³⁹ Many opined that this *Thiruvilayadal* can be watched and re-watched any number of times, for Sivaji Ganesan acting alone, whose radiant screen presence and majestic voice was aptly suited for this role.⁴⁰ Though he acted as Lord Siva a single role but as per the stories he portrayed four roles. The first role is to teach Murugan that parents are universe and another role as a Tamil poet, and shown third eye in the court of Pandya checking the knowledge of Nakkirar in Tamil. The Third role is as wood cutter and taught Hemanatha Bhagavathar that proud with the greatest talent is not good. Another role is as a fisher man to marry Goddess Parvathi who was born as a fisher woman due to misunderstanding.⁴¹

Then in a film, *Saraswathi Sabatham*, (1966), Sivaji Ganesan played double roles. In the film, *Thiruvavurchelvar*, (1967), Sivaji Ganesan played triple roles. In the film, *Thirumal Perumai*, (1967), he played again triple roles.⁴² These three movies were produced, scripted and directed by A.P. Nagarajan.

Deiva Magan, (1969) the film story was adopted from Bengal Story 'Ulka'. Sivaji Ganesan played three roles, father and two sons. In spite of the Director Thirulogachander's suggestion for two young actors for the role of two sons, Sivaji Ganesan as a challenge played the role of the two sons and brought out the difference in each of them through different make up, different manners and different body languages. *Ananda Vikatan*, a Tamil Magazine, in its review on 21st September 1969 appreciated the film that "*the makers have tried to build a hall with just one pillar and that was Sivaji Ganesan*". This was the

first film nominated from India as an entry for the Oscar Awards for the year 1969.⁴³

Epic Movies acted by Sivaji Ganesan

Sampoorna Ramayanam, (1958), the first epic movie was acted by Sivaji Ganesan as Bharathan. When Rajaji the political stalwart was asked opinion about this movie, "I found Bharathan" was his reply.⁴⁴

Another Tamil epic film, *Karnan*, (1964) was released on 14th January 1964. This was the only Tamil film that portrayed mythological character Karnan in a grand manner. It celebrated 100 days and became a cult film.⁴⁵ After 58 years, on 16th March 2012, digitalized film of '*Karnan*' was released and it celebrated 150 days. It was released in America, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, totally in 36 cinema theatres.⁴⁶

Dream Realised

Sivaji cherished the play of Kattabomman in his dream mind right from his childhood days. In his mind and heart, Kattabomman has been playing over and over again. After Sivaji Ganesan rose to the status of a film actor, he established Sivaji Nataka Mandram, a drama company and started playing Kattabomman. Seeing this play, producer B.R. Panthulu decided to make it into a film. Sakthi Krishnasamy wrote the Screenplay and dialogues.⁴⁷

The film, *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* was released on 6th May 1959. Initially the film was in Geva Color and then converted into Technicolor at London. *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*, is one of the most memorable films of Sivaji Ganesan, and it took his acting career to greater heights and established him firmly on the pinnacle of Tamil Cinema. This film is also a trend setter for presenting freedom fighters in a spirited manner, thus creating a new awakening among people on freedom and the value of independence.⁴⁸ For a while, 'Kavingar' Kannadasan produced the life of Maruthu pandians, the contemporary freedom fighters

with title, *Sivagangai Seemai* with S.S.Rajendran as hero. This movie was also released in the same month. Though it was also a well made film with powerful dialogues, this film was not match to Veera Pandiyya Kattabomman, starred by Sivaji Ganesan, and failed.⁴⁹

The film, *Veerapandiya Kattabooma* was life performance of Sivaji Ganesan and won him an international award as the Best Actor in Afro-Asia International Film Festival which was held at the Cairo in Egypt. This was the first award in his film career. Ananda Vikatan in its review on 24th May 1959 appreciated the film and said that this film adds pride to every person born as a Tamilian.⁵⁰

The "Pa" Series of Movies with Director Bhim Singh

Sivaji Ganesan played a number of films in 'Pa' series in Tamil, directed by Bhim Singh, a veteran in the film world. *Bagapirivina*, (31.10.1959), the first movie was directed by Bhimsingh of "Pa" series of movies acted by Sivaji Ganesan. Acted as a handicapped man, this story which gave the message that the strength of a family lies in being together. It was celebrated for running 200 days.⁵¹

Another Tamil film, *Padikkatha Methai*, (25.06.1960) was screen played and directed by Bhimsingh. Dialogue was written by K.S.Gopala krishnan. Ananda Vikatan in its review appreciated both Sivaji Ganesan and S.V.Rangarao but it was Sivaji Ganesan's acting which stays in our eyes even after we leave the theatre. Such was the impact of his acting. This was great success and run for 100 days.⁵²

The film *Pavamannippu*, (16.03.1961) was screenplayed, directed and produced by Bhimsingh. Dialogue was written by M.S.Solaimalai. It was the first film to present the theme of religious harmony among people and it run for 25 weeks and bagged national award.⁵³

The film *Pasamar*, (27.05.1961) was screen played by K.P.Kottrakkara and directed by Bhim Singh, Dialogue was written by Aroor Das.

Title for this film was given by Kannadasan. Tamil Cinema has witnessed several films on brother and sister relationship before and after this film but none could create such a great impact and become a cult film like this. It achieved an image which cannot be erased from the minds of the people forever and was the biggest box office hit of the year. It run for 26 weeks. This film is considered to be one of the greatest Tamil movies ever made. The remake of this film in Hindi, "*Rakhee*" acted by Ashok Kumar and Telugu remake "*Raktha Sambantham*" by N.T.R. were successful.⁵⁴

The film story and dialogue of *Palum Pazhamum*, (09.09.1961) was rendered by G.Balasubramaniam and the screenplay and direction was made by Bhim Singh. This film run for 139 days and it was box office hit movie.⁵⁵

The film story of *Parthal Pasi Theerum*, (14.01.1962) was done by A.C.Thirulo kachandar and screenplay and direction was made by Bhimsingh, Dialogue was written by Aroor Dass. Sivaji Ganesan acted as a handicapped after Bhagapirivina. Kamal Hasan acted in double role and first time with Sivaji Ganesan.⁵⁶

The film story of *Padithal Mattum Pothuma*, (14.04.1962) was made by Dhara Shankar Pandopathyaya, Dialogue was made by Aroor Dass, and screenplay and direction was done by Bhim Singh. This film run for 100 days.⁵⁷

The film story and dialogue of *Bandha Pasam*, (27.10.1962) was made by Valampuri Somanathan, and screenplay and direction was made by Bhim Singh. It produced by Shanthi Films Periannan and was released on behalf of 10th Anniversary of Sivaji's entry into the Tamil Cinema industry. This Film did fairly well.⁵⁸

The screenplay and direction of the film *Paar Magalae Paar*, (1963) was made by Bhim Singh and this movie is not a successful one. As usual, Sivaji Ganesan acted well. The film story of *Pachai Vilakku*, (03.04.1964) was made by G.K.Suriyam, dialogue by Rama.Arangannal, screenplay and direction by Bhimsingh. Actress Vijayakumari did the role as Sivaji Ganesan's step

sister. This film run for 100 days with good songs.⁵⁹ The films, *Palani*, (1965) and *Paladai*, (1967) were directed by Bhim Singh and they were not remarkable movies.

Sivaji Ganesan in Brahmin Roles

The film story and dialogue of *Vietnam Veedu*, (11.04.1970) was made by K.Sundaram and screen play and direction was done by P.Madhavan. This was a drama staged 1000 times all over the Tamil Nadu. As a film, it was produced by Sivaji Ganesan and it run for 100 days. The first Tamil film which portrayed Brahmin society's culture and prestige admirably well.⁶⁰ While acting in the stage, Sivaji Ganesan said, "All of you use the Brahmin dialects only to evoke laughs from the audience but I will use to make them cry". That was happened one day when S.S.Vasan broken on seeing acting of Sivaji Ganesan in this play.⁶¹ In the film *Gauravam*, again Sivaji Ganesan acted in double roles with Brahmin dialects written and directed by K.Sundaram.⁶²

Some of the Remarkable Movies of Sivaji Ganesan

The film story of *Thillana Mohanambal*, (27.07.1968) was written by Kothamangalam Subbu in *Ananda Vikatan* magazine and adopted for the film. Screenplay, dialogue, production and direction was done by A.P.Nagarajan. Sivaji Ganesan acted as Nadaswara Vidwan and Padmini as dancer. Nadaswaram music was provided by Madurai Sethuraman and Ponnusamy. After watching the film and Sivaji's acting, they said, "Sivaji enacted well like a real vidwan, leading us to wonder whether he is a vidwan or we are the vidwans".⁶³

The film's story of *Vasantham Maligai*, (26.09.1972) was written by Kausalya Devi, dialogues by Bala Murugan, screen play and direction was done by K.S.Prakash Rao and produced by D.Rama Rao. This film achieved the highest box office collection in the history of Tamil cinema till then, beating all earlier records. It run in Sri Lanka for 41 weeks. "This film had grandeur

in making, excellent colour, pleasantness in the acting of Sivaji and majesty in the palace shown in the film" reviewed by *Ananda Vikatan*.⁶⁴

The film *Thangapadhakkam*, (Gold Medal) (01.06.1974) was originally a play written by Mahendran by name "*Irundil Ondru*" for actor Senthamarai. After seeing this play, Sivaji Ganesan bought the play and with in short time it was staged for 100 times. Then it was made as a film. This film was the trend setter for all future police based stories in Tamil Cinema. Even Rajni Kanth inspired by Sivaji Ganesan's style of acting and acted in the same way in the Character Alex Pandian in the film of '*Moondru Mugam*. (Three Faces).⁶⁵

The film, *Mudhal Mariyadhai*, (First Respect) (30.08.1985) was directed by Bharathiraja who joined first time with Sivaji Ganesan did a great job. This is a landmark film depicted the love of an elderly person for the first time on screen, presented Sivaji Ganesan in a natural and realistic manner who proved that he could perform any kind of role if film makers had the right scripts for him.⁶⁶

Thevar Magan, (Son of Thevar) (25.10.1992), is one of the finest films in which Sivaji Ganesan underplayed his role and it earned him a special Jury award at the National Awards, the first in his career. The story, screenplay and dialogue of this film was made by Kamal Hasan and directed by Bharathan.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

Nadigar Thilagam, Chevalier Dr.Sivaji Ganesan, was an actor with par excellence. He dedicated his in the field of theatre and Cinema performances for a span of sixty years. With his style of acting, which has no parallel, he acquired millions of adoring fans. The fame which surrounded him in his heyday still lingers, for this kind of aura never dies. His contribution and legacy to the world of theatre and film industry has been tremendous. His wish in life was to become an actor that he achieved. He born in this world to teach the art of acting and he had

finished his job and left the world leaving a great legacy.

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