

Friday, February 15, 2008

ET MADRAS PLUS

>> LEGENDS | rinku gupta

Man of cinema

Ramesh Prasad talks about father L V Prasad's life in the film industry

The name Prasad itself, conjures up images of Prasad Studios and Labs in the busy Saligramam area of Chennai. Many a doyen of Hindi and regional cinema has passed through its portals in the last fifty years. Even today, films from all over the country come to the labs for printing and sound recordings. The Prasad Group now comprises

"He was a most simple man dedicated to his work. As kids, we would be asleep when he came home, he was so busy all day! Most of our education and daily needs were taken care of by my mother, Manoharamma. He would catch up on sleep in the car while travelling from one shoot to another when he was struggling to make a mark, doing two or three films at a time."

My father firmly believed in giving back to cinema what he got from it, investing back all his money into film production and technology

film labs, Efx, video digitization, recording studios and a film and TV academy besides being present in Singapore and Dubai. The man who founded this empire is destiny's child, actor, producer, director LV Prasad, destiny's child, who hailed from an agricultural family in Andhra. Today in his birth centenary year, Ramesh Prasad, his son, tells us how his family is taking his passion for cinema forward.

From humble beginnings... Ramesh Prasad (MD Prasad Group), lives mostly in Hyderabad, handling the entertainment division there

Seeing his father's struggle, Ramesh never wanted to join films and became an industrial engineer instead, graduating from the Oklahoma State University. But fate had other things in store and today Ramesh is carrying forward the Prasad legacy along with son Sai Prasad.

A Life for Cinema... Ramesh recounts the days when his teenaged father, left his wife and child in the village of Somavarapadu and landed in Mumbai with just Rs 100 in his pocket. "Our grandfather had declared insolvency because he had been trying unsuccessfully to



L V Prasad receiving an award from MGR; (inset) Ramesh Prasad

would take the extreme step of going so far away without speaking a word of English nor Hindi and with no money, friends or family to help him!

LV Prasad encountered many tough moments but he stuck to his goal. He struck gold when he landed a role in Alam Ara the first Indian Talkie in 1931 (with a monthly salary of Rs30). There was no looking back since. He even did a role in the first Tamil talkie Kalidas and in Bhakta Prahlada, the first Telugu talkie.

Later he went on to work as assistant director, worked in Prithvi Theatres and went on to act in hit movies before he found his métier as a director and producer. He directed memorable hits of the fifties, known for their social drama and humour in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, including the magnum opus Manohara, which elevated Sivaji Ganesan to the greatest heights of stardom.

In 1956 Prasad Productions was born and Ramesh helped set up Prasad Film Labs in Chennai in 1974.

Looking ahead...

Today, the company is the largest infrastructure for feature film post production in India. "My father firmly believed in giving back to cinema what he got from it, investing back all his

money into film production and technology," recounts Ramesh. The LV Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad was founded by him, "because it was with their eyes that audiences saw his films". The Dada Saheb Phalke award (1982) and a postage stamp (2006), bear testimony of the recognition he gained. Ramesh concludes, "My father's mottos were work is worship, honesty and commitment, passion, perseverance, patience and purity of thoughts. He was indebted to cinema and we owe everything we have to it."



With A V Meiyappan Chettiar



With Sivaji Ganesan

(which include the Imax theatre and mall). On a trip to Chennai during the centenary celebrations attended by the CM and film luminaries, he spoke to us, delving into memories of his father.

grow mulberry trees. Father was passionate about watching the old film prints shown in ramshackle huts in the village and he used to act in local dramas regularly. So he made his way to Mumbai at the first opportunity, to become an actor."

The pioneering spirit of the man is clear even from the start. Only someone passionate about films