

I'm still trying to execute dreams I dreamt at 19

From 'Arangetram' to the yet-to-be-released 'Aalavandan', Kamal Haasan has traversed many a rough and smooth terrain. From friendship to films, he discusses it all with **Subhash K. Jha** for The Hindu.

HE IS like an unstoppable cyclone. Bungee-jumping from a 21-storey high-rise building for his 201st film, the almost-complete Hindi-Tamil bi-lingual 'Aalavandan' one day, he is recording a song for his next Tamil film the next day. Kamal Haasan is still as determined to re-write the history of Indian cinema, as he was when he first descended on Tamil cinema as an adult actor in K. Balachander's 'Arangetram'.

His latest Tamil film 'Thenali' has just completed a silver jubilee run all over Tamil Nadu. Kamal Haasan speaks on the morning after the silver jubilee function of 'Thenali' as he drives through the crowded streets

of Chennai in his brand new Toyota. Excerpts:

How did the function go?

It went off very well. My colleague Rajnikanth had come for the prize distribution. There was nostalgia in the air. Some directors suggested that the two of us in another film would be the pinnacle of star-attraction.

How many films have you actually done with Rajnikanth?

About 10, most of them were hits, though we did have failures. We've done three films for our mentor K. Balachander. What is more, I've done guest roles in Rajni's films. I'd do anything he asks me to, no ques-

tion of refusing him.

Do the two of you have mutually exclusive fan clubs?

The war between the two fan clubs stopped only about 10 years ago. We both told them to stop after there were stray incidents of violence on both sides. I have turned my fan club into a social service organisation.

There's a marked element of Sivaji Ganesan in your performance as there is MGR in Rajnikanth's.

In fact we both incorporate elements of both the towering personalities. I've done what you'd call MGR kind of films. Sivaji saab felt squeamish about doing out-and-out masala films. Rajni too then changed his style to play the Sivaji kind of roles. In one film he played a character that ages from six to 60. That way we've criss-crossed paths on the screen.

What do you think about Rajnikanth as an actor?

When we were still in our 20s I asked him why he had to be so stylised on screen. He told me that it held the key to his success. I assured him my style would also be a winner... Rajni is a phenomenon too.

You mean, phenomenon no. 2?

No seriously, both of us were young actors who started from scratch. He was a bus conductor with acting aspirations. I was the clapper boy who got the clap in my very first film (Kamal Haasan played a character with venereal disease in his first adult role). We didn't have fathers to make movies for us. But we had the same godfather K. Balachander. Initially we were both type-cast as villains. I got fed up and went away to Kerala to do Malayalam films. Then

his career as a villain took off, and I returned to Chennai to pursue a career in Tamil cinema. We made our way up together. At the 'Thenali' function Rajni pointed out that though he is four years my senior, I'm his senior professionally and that he would take my advice about doing a film with me, if there is an occasion for us to star together.

Are you keen on the proposal?

It depends. It would be quite interesting to do a film with him. I was touched when he recalled at the function that "Kamal never let me down".

Tell me about the comic song you've just recorded?

It's a nice lighthearted song for my new film with Mouli, about a group of bachelors who talk against marriage.

Singing has been an abiding passion for you, hasn't it?

I've sung about 50 songs for my films beginning with one in Malayalam and one in 'Antharagam' (Tamil). A majority of them are in Tamil. My father wanted me to be a classical vocalist. I learnt classical singing. But not to the level he would have liked. Because of acting, writing, directing and production I couldn't pursue singing seriously. Now my elder daughter Shruti is learning Hindustani classical music. She's far more serious about it than I was.

Shruti is interested in a film career, isn't she?

Yes she certainly is.

Are you excited about another Haasan coming up in the acting field?

They are already there, though they aren't my children.

Who will replace you and Rajnikanth?

There was a time when audiences said none could replace Sivaji saab. Out of modesty he would say that his replacement would come. It took a long time for Sivaji saab to see a spark in me. He took me seriously as an actor after 17 years. I'm



Still dreaming: Kamal Haasan has not given up hope of producing 'Marudanayagam'

being realistic when I say a replacement would come.

There are so many gifted new boys. And I'm eager to encourage them. Ajith came for help about makeup. I put him on to my makeup man. Now Ajith is being appreciated for his looks and performance in 'Citizen'. The impact depends on the opportunity given.

You mentioned Ajith among your possible successors. Isn't he a pin-up boy?

So was I in the beginning. I had to do dance sequences even if I preferred to play non-glamorous roles. I've done approximately 25 films with Sridevi and an almost equal number of roles with Sripriya. These were mostly light romantic films.

The only place I could breathe easily as an actor was in Malayalam cinema. The best roles and opportunities came from Mr. Balachander. I've done about 35 films with him. Now in his 100th film featuring Madhavan I'm doing a guest role.

What about Madhavan?

I haven't seen much of his work. But I see real talent in Paresch Rawail.

You've been around for a good 25 years as a leading man. What changes do you notice in the film industry?

Very little. I'm still trying to execute those dreams that I dreamt at 19. Otherwise I think, the Tamil industry is quite stagnant. But as long as I live to tell the story, I guess I'm going to do so. My last two films 'Hey Ram' and now 'Thenali' have helped me bounce my ideas.

How do you answer the charge that your films are very expensive?

All the films that I do for outside producers are fairly within the budget. When I did 'Hey Ram' on my own, it cost as much as Shankar's 'Hindustani', although 'Hey Ram' was a bi-lingual. Every film of mine becomes an Arnold Schwarzenegger type of situation. 'Terminator 2' has to be bigger than 'Terminator'. In between the two biggies, 'Hey Ram' and 'Aalavandan' I did 'Thenali' which was shot in very few locations.

Are your dreams getting bigger?

No, for that I have to sleep longer. And I don't believe in daydreaming. But

'Marudanayagam' remains one of my dreams. Now I can get most of the finance in India, but only if my next few films do well. Luckily portions where I'm supposed to look younger have all been shot so that my growing older would become a part of the narrative.

Is it becoming progressively difficult for you to make films on your own terms?

It's always difficult, on my own and on other's terms. But I've no complaints. I'm a pampered technocrat. I sometimes want to kneel down and thank the Lord. Film-making is not an isolated endeavour. Making a film is like fighting a war. You can lose any time. Your soldiers might fail you. Your courage might fail you.

What are your expectations from your new Hindi-Tamil bi-lingual 'Aalavandan' considering 'Hey Ram' didn't work in some areas?

It didn't work anywhere. Critics were kind. But 'Hey Ram' was a commercial disaster. Yes, 'Aalavandan' is meant to make good the damage. It's a different genre altogether.



Phenomena: Rajnikanth (right) and Kamal Haasan remain the kings of Tamil cinema, but this is not all they have in common. While Kamal will do anything Rajni asks of him, Rajnikanth notes that Kamal has never let him down. Neither rules out the possibility of acting together and both acknowledge their debt to their mentor K. Balachander.

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Behind the actress - the real Jyothika

HER REAL NAME is Jyothika Sadna and she goes by the nickname Jo. She has acted with popular Tamil actors Vijay, Surya, Ajith and Kamal. But what is she like outside the movies. The popular Tamil actress talked to Cinesouth.com.

"There are two sisters and a brother in my family. My elder sister is the well known actress Nagma. Younger sister is doing her higher studies abroad and brother goes to school.

I am an ardent of A.R Rahman. I listen to all the songs in "Alaipayuthey" and am particularly fond of from "Kandukondain Kandukondain". At present I listen to the songs of "Kushi".

I love to watch movies in the theatre among the audiences. Particularly, if it is my movie. Oh! One cannot explain the happiness felt when the audiences give applause for good performances.

According to me, cinema's are to be watched only in the theatres.

My latest disappointment

is losing weight to achieve stardom in the movies.

My source of inspiration is Kajol in Hindi and Sridevi in Tamil film industry. Apart from them my major source of inspiration has been my mother, who is a constant moral support and has been responsible for the development of self confidence in me.

I believe in God and myself. Apart from self respect and self confidence of a person, I believe that hardwork pays results.

I dream of making my sister feel proud to proclaim that she is my sister.

My desire is to succeed in all aspects in my life.

I have two friends residing in Bombay. We are quite frank with each other. I share almost all the incidences of my life with them.

My sister Nagma is also a good friend and she has been my guide in my life.

I have not met people whom I dislike. I might give you a list of people after I complete few years in this industry.

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