

KPAC LALITHA: A VERSATILE AND LEGENDARY ACTRESS

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Preface

KPAC Lalitha was one of the well-known actors in Malayalam Cinema who passed away recently. KPAC Lalitha's acting style drew its intense energy from theatre. Her unparalleled skills in emoting created a powerful presence in the visual and narrative field. Through her performances she always brought the best out of her fellow actors who always struggled to keep up with her energy and presence. This project attempts to trace her journey as an artist; her turbulent personal life and an illustrious professional life. The introductory chapter invites the attention of the reader to the early life of KPAC Lalitha, her foray into theatre and subsequent journey to films. The core chapter entitled 'KPAC Lalitha; A Versatile and Legendary Actress' illustrate her major contribution as an actor par excellence and revisits some of her memorable performances. The third chapter looks at the remarkable legacy of KPAC Lalitha.

Chapter one

Introduction

KPAC Lalitha's demise has left a void that is irreversible, but she will live in the hearts of the cineastes forever through her memorable performances. The comedy in *Manichithrathazhu*, the pathos in *Manasinakkare*, the villainy in *Malooty* and the numerous characters she etched out in her long career made her a queen of emotions. With a face that could carry a sea of expressions and a voice that could immortalise characters, KPAC Lalitha was an unparalleled actor in Malayalam cinema.

In her long and illustrious career, KPAC Lalitha experimented with almost all genres and made a special place for herself in every Malayali cinema lover's heart. With her natural and innocent dialogue delivery and nuanced performances, she explored many shades of human emotions through her characters. This project attempts to highlight her contribution as an artist who is well-known for the variety of characters she has portrayed during her career spanning six decades.

KPAC Lalitha was born as Maheswari Amma on February 25, 1948, at Kayamkulam. Her father Ananthan Nair was a freelance photographer and mother Bhargavi Amma was a home maker. From a young age Maheswari showed an interest in art. She was very fond of dance, music and theatre. Once when she visited her father at Changanassery, in Kottayam District, where he worked, Maheswari received an invitation from the famous Geetha Theatre Troupe to join in their drama rehearsal. Even though her parents showed little interest in their 10-year-old daughter acting in drama, she got selected to play a role, which turned out to be her stage debut. After that she got the opportunity to act in the play *Mathrubhumi*, written by the legendary playwright and actor P J Antony. It was a rare feat for a kid like her to earn a contract with Changanassery Geetha Theatre Troupe.

Maheswari soon became famous in theatre circles of southern Kerala. Her adaptation skills and versatility were unique. She got invitations from different drama clubs. Actors like Sankaradi, SL Puram Sadanandan, Paravoor Bharathan, Azeez and Bahadoor were impressed by this young talent and eventually helped her join KPAC. It was after a long interview session that Maheswari got selected as a full-time actor in KPAC and subsequently she changed her name to Lalitha. Lalitha was not only an actor but a member of the communist party. The Kerala People Arts Club (KPAC) was a left-wing group, which made tremendous contributions to the growth of the communist movement in the erstwhile Travancore state of southern Kerala. Lalitha was a much sought-after stage actor right from her teens. When Malayalam cinema gradually developed into an industry by absorbing actors, writers and directors from theatre, Lalitha became a part of it; rather an inevitable part. She started acting at the age of 10. She continued for more than six decades.

KPAC Lalitha's first movie, *Koottukudumbam* (1969, Dir. KS Sethumadhavan), was an adaptation of a play, which was staged in Udaya Studio in front of producer and studio owner Kunchacko. The play turned out to be an audition for many of the performers. Kunchacko selected four actors the moment it was over. All of them, KPAC Lalitha, Alammoodan, Adoor Bhavani and Khan Saheb, were given an advance to act in the film.

Interestingly one of brightest stars of Indian cinema, Mammooty, also acted in that film as a teenaged junior actor. Her next film, *Koottukudumbam*, was a superhit and made Lalitha Udaya Studio's lucky mascot. She was a part of every movie produced by the studio. Love interest of Sathyan, mother of Prem Nazir, wife of Mammooty- Lalitha played every role in the course of her six-decade, 550-film Career.

"Anubhavangal Palichakal (1971, Dir. KS Sethumadhavan) made Lalitha into a household name" (*The Hindu*). She played a character called Parvathi, a working-class girl who falls in love with a communist activist, Chellappan (Sathyan), a married man. Lalitha beautifully portrayed Parvathi's love, charm and innocence in a song sequence. Even after five decades, 'Kalyani Kalavani Chollammini Chollu', remains evergreen and is one of the most searched songs on YouTube.

In the late 1970s she married filmmaker Bharathan. After a short break she returned to Malayalam cinema in the '80s. In 1990, when renowned director Adoor Gopalakrishnan made an adaptation of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's *Mathilukal*. Lalitha had a unique role in it, without being physically present. *Mathilukal* is a biographical short story of Basheer and Lalitha gives voice to Narayani, a female inmate, without ever appearing on screen. The movie was screened at the Venice Film Festival. It won four awards at the National Film Awards in 1990. In films like *Amaram*, (Dir. Bharathan, 1991), *Manichitrathazhu* (Dir. Fazil, 1993), or *Godfather*, (Dir. Siddique Lal, 1991), Lalitha's performances stand out. She could easily get into the skin of any character and convey a range of emotions with just a murmur.

The Malayalam film industry has given us wonderful actors, but only a few women choose acting as their lifelong career. Most often young women would stop acting once they got married. Lalitha twice decided to stop acting, once when she got married and the next time after her husband's untimely death. She couldn't stay away for long and returned to her craft. KPAC Lalitha was immensely talented, versatile and committed. She had a lot of health problems, but she never quit. With her passing, Malayalam cinema has lost an icon.

At the beginning of her career, Lalitha shared screen space with the superstars such as Sathyan, Prem Nazir and Madhu, among others. Over the years, she started

playing the role of a sister or mother to a new generation of actors who appeared in Malayalam cinema, including Mamooty, Mohanlal, Suresh Gopi and Jayaram among others. It is tough to separate Lalitha from the Malayalam cinema as we know it today. She remained active till the very last and was seen in recently released *Bheeshmaparvam*.

She reveals quite a lot of the difficult life, sometimes drenched in poverty, other times in emotional distress, in her autobiography *Katha Thudarum*. "Written in a conversational style, it is easy to imagine hearing it in her voice, known to reflect a plethora of shifting emotions" (Jacob). Eulogies were written about the magic in her voice when she died two weeks ago, after months of lying unwell with a liver ailment.

"Condoling her death, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said she could make her way into hearts of different generations with her acting skills" (*keralakaumadi.com*). A winner of two national awards for the best supporting role and four State awards, she held the post of Chairperson of the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi before she took seriously ill and disappeared from the public scene. Her first national award came for her character in *Amaram* in 1991. In 2000, for her performance in Jayaraj's *Shantham*, a second national award for best-supporting role was awarded to her. She bagged her first State Award in 1975 for *Neelaponman*. It was followed by *Aaravam* (1978), *Amaram* (1990) and *Kadinjool Kalyanam*, *Godfather* and *Sandesham* (1991). In later years, she also became active in television serials. She acted in music albums and also took part in commercials.

Chapter Two

KPAC Lalitha: A Versatile and Legendary Actress

KPAC Lalitha refined her acting skills with time and aged like old wine, surprising her fans every day. In a career spanning over 550 films Lalitha has played a plethora of remarkable roles in movies such as *Amaram*, *Shantham*, *Manichithrathazhu*, *Godfather*, *Vietnam Colony*, *Pavithram* and *Aniyathipravu*. Her combinations with acting powerhouses such as Nedumudi Venu who passed away last year and Innocent were memorable hugely due to the versatility that they brought to their roles, never repeating the same performance. Innocent said that while performing with Lalitha he was always sure that the scene would be better because she had the innate ability to transform into the characters the filmmakers had written keeping only her in mind (Jacob).

KPAC Lalitha was born to her parents after a wait of five years. Her parents prayed to the Goddess in the Chengannur temple for a child and were blessed with one. As the Goddess' name was Maheshwari Amma, relatives of her mother decide to name the actress after the Goddess. But her father named her Lalitha. As the actress was so attached to her father, upon entering the drama troupe of KPAC, the actress decided to keep the name and thus adopted the name KPAC Lalitha.

From a young age Maheshwari showed an interest in art. She was very fond of dance, music and theatre. Once when she visited her father at Changanassery, Maheshwari received an invitation from the famous Geetha theatre troupe to join in their drama rehearsal. Even though her parents showed little interest in their 10-year-old daughter acting in drama, she got selected to play a role which turned to be her stage debut. After that she got the opportunity to act in the play *Mathrubhumi*, written by the legendary playwright and actor PJ Antony.

Maheswari soon became famous in theatre circles of southern Kerala. Her adaptation skills and versatility was remarkable. She got invitations from different drama clubs. Actors like Sankaradi, SL Puram Sadanandan, Paravoor Bharathan, Azeez and Bahadoor were impressed by this young talent and eventually helped her join KPAC. This was the beginning of her career as an artist. It was after a long interview session that Maheswari got selected as a full-time actor in KPAC and subsequently she changed her name to Lalitha. Lalitha was a much sought-after stage actor right from her teens. When Malayalam cinema gradually developed into an industry by absorbing actors, writers and directors from theatre, Lalitha became an inevitable part of it.

Her second play, *Ningalenne Communistakki* (1952), was a significant work of art that has an important role in Kerala's political history. *Ningalenne Communistakki*, played a phenomenal role in propagating Communist and socialist ideologies across Kerala. The play also contributed its share in ensuring that the first Communist government in the country assumed power in Kerala in 1957. The play revolves around people who face hardships stemming from the feudal system. Landlord-tenant relationship and other social issues that prevailed in the 1950s reflected in the play.

In the 1950s, KPAC was so popular that every artist wanted to be part of it. She also sang two songs in that play. Her first movie was the film adaptation of *Koottukudumbam* directed by K. S. Sethumadhavan. In 1978 she married Bharathan, a noted Malayalam film director. She took a break from film acting for sometime, doing only a few films. She was very popular and was busy with many movies at that time. After marriage with Bharathan, She did not engage in any projects.

After few years she started with *Kattathe Kilikkoodu* (1983) directed by her husband. Her pairing with actor Innocent was hugely popular. Between

1986 and 2006 she acted in successful films like *Gajakesariyogam*, *Apporvam Chillar*, *Makkal Mahatmiyam*, *Shubha Yatra*, *My Dear Muthachan*, *Kallanum Polisum*, *Arjunan Pillaiyum Anju Makkalum*, *InjankaddanMathai and Sons* and *Pavam Pavam Rajakumaran*. During this time, she did many critically acclaimed roles including those in *Kattukuthira* (1990), *Sanmanassullavarkku Samadhanam* (1986), *Ponn Muttyidunna Tharavu* (1988), *Mukunthetta Sumitra Vilikkunnu* (1988), *Vadakku Nooki Yanthram* (1989), *Innate Program* (1991), *Dasharatham* (1989), *Venkalam* (1993), *Godfather* (1991), *Amaram* (1991), *Vietnam Colony* (1993), *Pavithram* (1993), *Manichitrathazhu* (1994), *Sphadikam* (1995), and *Aniyathi Pravu* (1997). She won the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actress for her performance in *Amaram* (1991), a film directed by her husband Bharathan.

In 1998, when her husband Bharathan died, she took another break for a few months; only to come back with an acclaimed performance in Sathyam Anthikkad directed *Veendum Chila Veetukaryangal* (1999). KPAC Lalitha's notable roles after that were in *Shantham* (2000), *Life Is Beautiful* (2000) and *Valkannadi* (2002). She won her second National Film Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in *Shantham* (2000), directed by Jayaraj. KPAC Lalitha acted in over 500 films in Malayalam cinema. Apart from Malayalam, she acted in some Tamil films including *Kadhalukku Mariyadhai* (1997), Maniratnam's *Alaipayuthey* (2000) and *Kaatru Veliyidai* (2017). Particularly, her performance in Tamil film *Kadhalukku Mariyadhai* as Shalini's mother won her critical acclaim.

KPAC Lalitha was one of the actors who began playing much older characters from the beginning, so when age finally caught up, she simply settled into the many roles she was prematurely doing. One of her final memorable performances was as Akashvani in *Varane Avashyamundo*, sharing a special bond with a young man

(Dulquer Salmaan) and a boy. A few years before that, she played one of the protagonists in *Thanichalla Njan*, along with late actor Kalpana, telling the real life story of two women, bonded by love that conquers the differences in their faith. Around the same time, she also played a role in her son Siddharth's directorial debut, *Nidra*.

The last of her State Awards was for *Snehaveedu* which was directed by Sathyan Anthikad a filmmaker who made the best use of Lalitha's appeal towards the family audience. From *Aduthaduthu*, *TP Balagopalan MA*, *Sandesham* and *Gandhinagar 2nd Street* to *Kochu Kochu Santoshangal* and *Njan Prakashan* their collaborations saw KPAC Lalitha at her humorous best while adding the layered sentiments.

Though her light-hearted roles in mainstream commercial cinema still stay etched in the memory it's her poignant roles as Bhargavi and a grief-stricken Narayani in Bharathan's *Amaram* and Jayaraj's *Shantham* respectively that won her her two National awards. This is also testament to Lalitha's versatility where she was able to straddle roles in both mainstream and parallel cinema with roles in movies such as Adoor's *Swayamvaram* and *Kodiyettam*. Bharathan was probably the director who best explored her range as an actor through films such as *Keli*, *Nidra*, *Venkalam* and *Amaram*.

KPAC Lalitha's ability to seamlessly step into the shoes of the character she was playing ensured that she was one of the most sought after supporting actors in Malayalam cinema. Due to her acting prowess, she continued to remain the mainstay of the film industry through the 80s, 90s, 2000s and 2010s through a diverse array of roles unmatched in the industry. She proved that she could handle any kind of role with ease across multiple genres. But, she excelled in the family dramas, donning

roles of mother, sister, sister-in-law and daughter. She was the one who often appeared as the sharp-tongued mother, the sassy sister-in-law, the nosey neighbour, the inquisitive wife, and many other memorable roles that entertained viewers over generations. Her ability to seamlessly step into the shoes of the character she was playing ensured that she was one of the most sought after supporting actors in Malayalam cinema. Some of her notable performances are discussed in the following paragraphs.

In *Amaram*, her first National Award winning role, Lalitha played a sarcastic and loud -mouthed mother to Ashokan's Raghavan. The film, directed by Bharathan is focused on the relationship between a fisherman father (Mammootty) and his daughter (Mathu) for whom he has big dreams. Lalitha's Bhargavi with her vettila-stained mouth, cutting remarks and affection for her son, won the audience's hearts.

In T S Suresh Babu directed Dennis Joseph scripted film *Kottayam Kunjachan*, KPAC Lalitha plays Eliyamma, the wife of a god-fearing Pala Achayan (Innocent) who can't say boo to a goose. But Eliyamma more than makes up for it; she is feisty, has a ready tongue, guards her daughters like a lioness and for good effect, calls her sturdy brothers to fight it out when things go out of hand. There is a scene where she challenges Kanjirapally Pappan (antagonist played by Pratap Chandran) with words and it looks like she has imbibed all the nuances of a typical middle-class Catholic Christian woman, including the dialect.

KPAC Lalitha played a sex worker in Siby Malayail's *Sadayam*. The film was a murder mystery with a convict who shows no remorse for his actions, the lead role was played by Mohanlal. Lalitha's Devaki is a pivotal character in the film. She's bold, flirtatious and unashamed of the work she does, giving it back as good as she gets from society. In *Manichitrathazhu*, KPAC Lalitha and Innocent combination was

a favourite with filmmakers and audiences alike. In Fazil's *Manichitrathazhu*, a psychological thriller, she played Bhasura, wife to Innocent's character. One of the family members of an ancient and superstitious tharavad, Lalitha's antics with Innocent are hilarious, to say the least. The scene where she tries to tie a thread around her husband's waist while refusing to tell him why is among the best in the film.

Spadikam, a film about the conflicted relationship between an overly strict father (Thilakan) and his rebellious son (Mohanlal), Lalitha played Ponnamma, the mother who is caught between the two warring men. She is torn between her love for her son and her concerns about the social repercussions for his actions. The film was directed by Bhadrar. *Vadakkunokkiyanthram*, directed by Sreenivasan, was about Dineshan (Sreenivasan), an insecure man with a beautiful wife. Lalitha played Dineshan's mother to perfection, ordering him around and playing up the drama in the family conflicts. The scene in which Dineshan tiptoes around his sharp-tongued mother is truly hilarious.

KPAC Lalitha effortlessly played a romantic in Priyadarshan's *Thenmavin Kombathu*. She essayed the role of a woman who is in love with Thampuran (Nedumudi Venu). Though KPAC Lalitha had only a few scenes in the film, she made sure to leave her mark. She expressed Omana's unrequited love with subtle emotions

In *Sandesham*, directed by Sathyan Anthikkad, a film about two brothers (Sreenivasan and Jayaram) belonging to rival political parties and the subsequent drama that unfolds in their home. Lalitha played their older sister, Latha, who is married to a policeman entangled in the political doings of her brothers. To get back at them, Latha moves into her parental home with her family. While her brothers might be good at the political game outside, Latha, the smooth talker, is the master at

home. In *Sasneham*, also directed by Sathyan Anthikad, about a Malayali Christian man (Balachandra Menon) who marries a Tamil Brahmin woman (Shobana). Lalitha plays the man's older sister, and is a delight to watch when the turf war begins between the two families. Her scenes with Sukumari, who plays Shobhana's aunt, are especially funny.

KPAC Lalitha as Kunju Maria in *Manassinakkare* forms a warm, poignant bond with the lead Kochu Thresia played by Sheela. The friendship between Kunju Maria and Thresia has aged like fine wine and it's to Lalitha's credit that she brings effortless warmth to the scenes between them. She balances Sheela's slightly theatrical expressions. That final parting scene where she forbids her friend from seeing her off when she leaves is vintage KPAC Lalitha.

KPAC Lalitha played the role of Bhagirathi in Sathyan Anthikad's *Ponmuttayidunna Tharavu*, the devious local astrologer PV Panikkar's (Innocent) wife who doesn't have a voice and agrees with all his unscrupulous plans. The crackling chemistry between KPAC Lalitha and Innocent as she brings her own little tricks, giving a hilarious spin to what looks like a plain character on paper.

The KPAC Lalitha brand of naivety is in full form in *Gajakeasariyogam* directed by PG Viswambharan. She depicted the character of Madhavi and is paired opposite Innocent, who plays Ayyappan Nair, a mahout who buys a circus elephant and finds himself learning Hindi among a lot of other things. These actors have come together as a couple in umpteen films, this time they bring something fresh to the table. From learning Hindi together to using it against each other to the demure way she addresses her husband, much to his exasperation, the Innocent—Lalitha partnership strikes gold again with this one.

In TK Rajeev Kumar's *Pavithram*, KPAC Lalitha stepped into the shoes of Punchiri. Punchiri is an aunt to Unnikrishnan (Mohanlal). And when Unnikrishnan is left with his infant sister, after the untimely demise of his mother, Punchiri, turns a mother to the child. Though she hasn't given birth to the child, she breastfeeds the infant, and takes care of the child. It is impossible to watch those scenes without bursting into tears.

In *Mathilukkal*, directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, KPAC Lalitha played the female lead in the film but she's never seen. The story is about Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (Mammootty) who is imprisoned for sedition, and develops a romance with a female prisoner across the high wall that separates the two prisons. Lalitha gave voice to Narayani, Basheer's love, whom he never gets to meet. A poignant role in which KPAC Lalitha proved that she could move the audience even with her voice. Her familiar voice from beyond the prison wall, conveying many an emotion, was one of the key elements of the film. That voice, at times breaking with emotion, while at other times radiating mirth and playfulness, was but just one element of her acting skill, which could just take any shape, as required.

KPAC Lalitha as Kochammini in *Godfather* is another character who matches wits with Innocent in every frame, she adds a swag in the unlikeliest scene, the one where she orders the panchamela artist to continue with their performance easily making it unforgettable.

In *Kanalkattu*, another Sathyan Anthikkad film, Lalitha played Omana, a domestic worker who is exploited by her employer (Innocent). The latter arranges for a man to marry her for money, just to avoid the embarrassment of everyone coming to know of his actions. Mammootty played Narayanan, the reluctant husband, who is disgusted by Omana and her overt signs of affection. But towards the end, when

Omana speaks her mind, dissolving the illusion that she had no idea about his true feelings, Lalitha packs a gut-punch with her acting prowess.

As someone who was adept at portraying a range of emotions, almost effortlessly, she was the go-to actress to play character roles, which were almost as important as that of the protagonist. The seeming lack of effort was perhaps a testament to how acting came naturally to her, having been performing since her younger days. In the initial decade, she acted in landmark films in Malayalam, including Adoor Gopala Krishnan's new wave-pioneering *Swayamvaram* and *Kodiyettam* and Padmarajan's *Peruvazhiyambalam*.

While most of the Tamil films didn't really exploit her incredible acting prowess, she still managed to make an impression in the brief roles. In her most memorable role in Tamil cinema, *Kadhalukku Mariyadhai* KPAC Lalitha aced the character of a family matriarch who loves her daughter but is pained when she realises that the girl has broken her trust and fallen in love. And she owned the climax when her character decides to reunite the young lovers after observing their dignified romance.

Among the few Tamil films that Lalitha did was Mani Ratnam's romantic drama *Alaipayuthe*, in which she played Madhavan's mother. Karthik, Madhavan's character, is forever at loggerheads with his father. It's the mother who comes to her son's rescue on each occasion. Their casual exchange in The 'Alaipayuthey' song, when he points out the woman he's going to marry, is one of the best in the film. In the Ajith Kumar-starrer *Kireedom*, KPAC Lalitha played the actor's grandmother in a role that had a couple of comedy scenes but remains largely a background presence. But the seasoned actress ensured that we always noticed her in the background.

Another aspect of KPAC Lalitha as an artiste that was exploited by Malayalam filmmakers was her ability to narrate stories in flashback in movies. This was often as good as visualising them. In *Manichitrathazhu*, the way Basura Kunjamma narrates the story of Karanavar and Nagavalli to Ganga is one instance where KPAC Lalitha's exceptional storytelling skills take us back to a different time period. Along with Ganga, played by Shobhana, who intently listens to Bhasura's narration, the viewers are also taken back to the story of Karanavar and Nagavalli. The way KPAC Lalitha narrates the folklore to Ganga like a grandmother to curious children is a masterclass in narration. And in a split second, she snaps out of the narrator mode saying 'ithokepazhmakkarparanjathaneee' (all this is rumour as told by the older generation). There is no need for the director to visualise the story of Karanavar in the film as KPAC Lalitha's character did the job.

In her later years, Lalitha came into our homes through television. She played comic roles too; her role as the prickly matriarch in the TV series "Thatteem Mutteem" cracked us up. Lalitha may no longer be around, but her roles will remain green in our memory, as she has been a part of our lives. Even in the recent movie *Home*, KPAC Lalitha played an ageing grandmother who narrates an incident involving Indrans' character Oliver Twist. It is a key plot point in the movie that connects two timelines and KPAC Lalitha's narration of an important incident in her life is again like a wise old grandmother narrating a fairytale to curious children.

Even in a small role in the film *Adam Joan*, a movie trying to use the concept of Satan worship, KPAC Lalitha's description of Karuthachanootu, a cult worshipping Satan, gives us the chills. KPAC Lalitha's narration about Karuthachanootu makes the movie exciting. The viewer can feel the excitement growing the moment KPAC Lalitha's character confronts Lena's character, who is part of the Satan cult. The way

she uses her eyes and expressions in line with her narrative style builds excitement in viewers, making those scenes memorable. In movies like *Urumi* and Sanalkumar Sasidharan's *Chola*, KPAC Lalitha's voice is used to narrate a folklore as an introduction to the movie which sets the mood and tone of the films.

She also acted in Music Albums such as 'Ente Malayalam', 'Chingapenninu Kannezhuthan', 'Ochiravasan', 'Amme Kaathukollanne', 'Devaragam'. She also played a wide range of characters in television serials. Her Serials include *Manasi* (1990), *Kalanum kandakashani* (1990), *Akshayapaathram* (1995), *Sthree* (1998-2000), *7 Mukhangal* (1999), *Black and White* (2000), *Magam* (2000), *Naarmadi pudava* (2000), *Avasthantharangaal* (2001), *Aathma* (2001), *Sthreejanmam* (2002-2003), *Sparsham* (2002), *Kochu Thresya kochu* (2004), *Vava* (2004), *Dambathya Geethangaal* (2004-2005), *Sindoorarekha* (2005), *Mounam* (2006), *Sathi Leelavathi* (2006), *Velutha Kathrina* (2006), *Satyam* (2007), *Hello Mayavi* (2007), *Swami Ayappan* (2007), *Vishudha Thomasleeha* (2008), *Kathanar kadamattathu kathanar* (2008), *Akkare Ikkare* (2008), *Pakalmazha* (2010), *Pattukalde Pattu* (2011-2012), *Aakashadoothu* (2011-2013), *Thattem Muttem* (2011-2021), *Indira* (2012-2013), *Nagamma* (2013), *Marithattem Mayammutterem* (2016), *Chakkappazham* (2021).

KPAC Lalitha was also an accomplished dubbing artist and occasionally lent her voice to actors such as Sharada, Surekha and Nandita Bose. She dubbed for sharada in six movies such as *Aabhijathyam* (1971), *Theerthayathra* (1972), *Udayam* (1973), *Bhadraadeepam* (1973), *Veendum Prabhatam* (1973) and *Sreedevi* (1977). Films like *Dharmayudham* (1973), *Padmavyooham* (1973), *Panitheeraatha Veedu* (1973), *Simhasanam* (1979), *Thakara* (1980), *Mathilukal* (1990) are milestones in her dubbing career.

She also wrote an autobiography, *Katha Thudarum* in 2010. She reveals her difficult life, sometimes drenched in poverty, others in emotional distress. Written in a conversational style, it is easy to imagine hearing it in her voice, known to reflect a plethora of shifting emotions. She gave a picture of her life through this work. This autobiography won Cherukad Award in 2013.

She was the Chairperson of the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi until she became gravely ill and vanished from the public eye. She won two National Awards for best supporting part and four state awards. She won National awards for best supporting actress for the movies *Amaram* (1990) and *Shantham* (2000). She won Kerala state film awards for the second best actress for the movies *Neela Ponman*, *Onnum Lelle* (1975), *Aaravam* (1978), *Amaram* (1990), *Kadinjool Kalyanam*, *Godfather*, *Sandhesam* (1991). She also the recipient of Asianet film awards for best supporting actress for the movies *Shantham* (2000), *Thaniye*, *Nasrani*, *Aakasham* (2007), *Snehaveedu* (2011). In 2009, she won Filmfare Life Achievement Award. The other awards are Premji Award(2007), Thoppil Bhasi Prathibha Award(2009), Annual Malayalam Movie Award for Best Outstanding Performances(2009), Bharat Murali Award (2010), Bahadoor Award (2011), Kambisseri Karunakaran Award (2011), Thoppil Bhasi Prathibha Award(2012), M T Chandrasenan Award(2013), Kalaratna Fellowship by Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi(2014), Sangam Lifetime Achievement Award(2014), Vanithalokam Award(2014). Part-Ono Films-Samaadharanam-'Prashasthipathram'(2015), SIIMA Lifetime Achievement Award(2015), Vanitha Film Award – Lifetime Achievement(2015), TCR Bharath P.J.Antony Smaraka Abhinaya Prathibha Award(2015), IIFA Awards IIFA Utsavam – Performance in a Supporting Role (Female) –Nominated(2015), Parabrahma

Chaithanya Award(2016), PK Rosy Award Devarajan Master Award, Good Knight Film and Business Awards 2017.

KPAC Lalitha was undoubtedly one of the finest actors Indian cinema had ever seen, who chose drama as her life and livelihood, even before she was sixteen. KPAC Lalitha was alive in theatre groups even when she was a student. A seasoned actress who began her career from the black and white era continued to entertain her audience till 2022. She portrayed characters that were everyday and ordinary, but always also strong and reactive. She is irreplaceable for this skill to bring vibrancy to down to earth characters. She lived her life in the same manner, with bold honesty.

KPAC Lalitha's character has never been an ordinary mother or mistress. A certain type of elusive firmness of mind, a depth and inflexibility are always there in a KPAC Lalitha's character. A suppressed violence seems to be the hallmark of KPAC Lalitha's character. She will always remain one of the most celebrated natural actors to have graced the screen.

Chapter Three

Conclusion

Basheer walks whistling by the side of a great big fence that separated jail from jail. He stops mid-tune, hearing a peculiar female voice, asking who is whistling out there. Basheer's face brightens up at this unexpected company in a jail, a voice in the void left behind by the inmates who were no longer there. She asks his name, he hers. Narayani, says she; beautiful name, says he. Aged 22, says she; beautiful age, says he. In *Mathilukal*, this is the only way we know Narayani, as a voice across a fence. KPAC Lalitha, that treasured artist of Malayalam cinema, leads a beautiful love story just by her voice, opposite Mammooty's Basheer. ("Queen of Emotions, KPAC Lalitha Will be Missed")

When KPAC Lalitha passed away from an illness on the night of February 22, 2022 tributes that poured in remembered the voice that created magic on the screen. KPAC Lalitha was one of the most sought after actor in the Malayalam film industry, her success was the result of her talent, dedication and hardwork. The natural look in the acting, the moans and the bursting into tears enthralled the audience. She imbibed the pain of the characters and gave it to the audience. What distinguishes a great actor from a good one is that while the latter does justice to the role and fits personal intensity to his or her presence, the genius of a great actor like KPAC Lalitha rested on her ability of being raw and bringing untameable energy into her performances. For her acting was like sculpting each moment from the narrative mass, constantly modulating and mixing the levels of intensity of bodily movements and facial expressions and the depth and intonations of her voice. Actors like her are rare and she had an all consuming passion for art and the courage to speak out.

expressions and the depth and intonations of her voice. Actors like her are rare and she had an all consuming passion for art and the courage to speak out.

“From black and white movies to color, film to digital, classics to realism, she has been part of Malayalam cinema’s transition” (timesofindia.com). Known for her versatility in playing a wide range of characters, Lalitha began her acting career as a theatre artist with KPAC (Kerala People’s Arts Club)—a theatre collective in Kerala, five decades ago. The characters she played demonstrated her immense range. There was not genre that she couldn’t handle. On screen she was extremely powerful, yet subtle, so true to life, yet dramatic, chokingly emotional yet understated. Her space was very limited, yet she stood tall and often amplified the performance of the stars.

Another notable fact is how even in portraying a mother on screen, KPAC Lalitha could bring in such rich variation. The magnitude of KPAC Lalitha’s acting powers and screen presence would be further realised when you look at how she walked away with accolades even in movies when she played a small role or just made a guest appearance. KPAC Lalitha was not an actor who acted only in big budget films, she was entirely different. The passion of acting made her appear in many guest appearance roles also. She always focused on immersing herself completely to the character she was given. She evolved a different symphony of maternity and old age through her acting in the last decade of her life.

KPAC Lalitha was also popular due to her impeccable comic timing. The magic that she does with her voice in comedy scenes cannot be claimed by any other actor. No one but she alone could portray the role of a mother coming in one scene in the film *Kanmadam*. In the film *Manassinakkare*, the gaze of Kunju Mariyam while she tries to hold her feeling at the time she arrives to see her friend near the fence made a urchin in the audience's mind. In the film *Shantham*, we can read the

character of mother who goes alone after the loss of the child Narayani. The audience can witness the whole woman attitude through the face of Lalitha, on the silver screen. Malayalees will never forget the simplicity of the question "Will you remember me when I die"; from the film *Mathilukal* by Adoor Gopalakrishnan through this dialogue KPAC Lalitha will never be forgotten. Lalitha is absent in the film *Mathilukal*. But it was Narayani who sounded beyond the mathilukal or walls. There is no such character in the memories of Malayalee who has captured the silver screen only by sound. Adoor Gopalakrishnan cast Lalitha to be the only voice in the film *Mathilukal* due to her ability to handle the characters. Narayan's importance is not only in not seeing her. But her conversation is seductive to the man on the other side of the wall. The film and the sound of Lalitha also became popular.

KPAC Lalitha was able to break the barriers to go beyond, adding personal intensity and forcefulness to her characters. This leaves behind in the minds of the viewers a profusion of thoughts that gradually creates on its own, a whole and unique emotional persona. KPAC Lalitha essayed umpteen roles elaborating the shades of motherhood in all its diversity, intensity and complexity. Versatility was her hallmark and she could turn from bitter to soft within a span of seconds. During her four decades, through numerous films, the mother figure played by Lalitha had several faces of the strict and punishing mother. Her commitment to work was pure. She encouraged new script writers and connected them with directors to join the industry.

It's been more than 50 years since acting became a passion for KPAC Lalitha, who went on to be part of more than 550 movies. Even at a time when the industry is accused of not incorporating enough characters for veteran actors, Lalitha was as busy as ever. With her death Malayalam Cinema has lost a great artist and a thinking actor whose passion for her art overshadowed everything else in her life.

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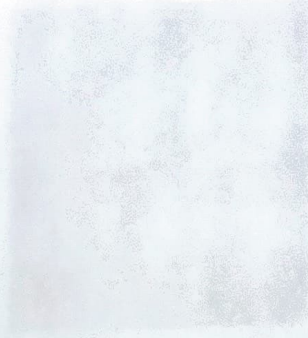
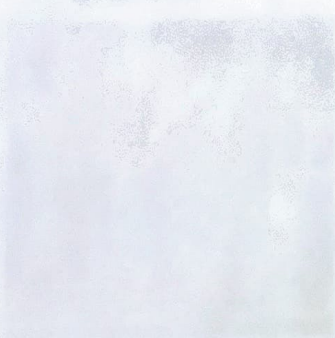
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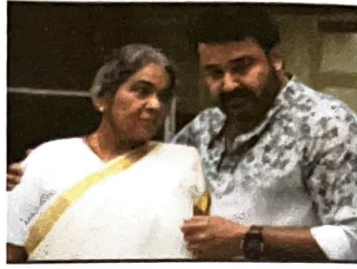


Appendix

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ITTIMANI



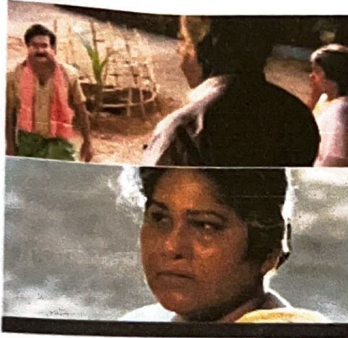
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**VEENDUM CHILA
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SPADIKAM



MANASSINAKKARE



VALKANNADI



MANICHITRATHAZHU

