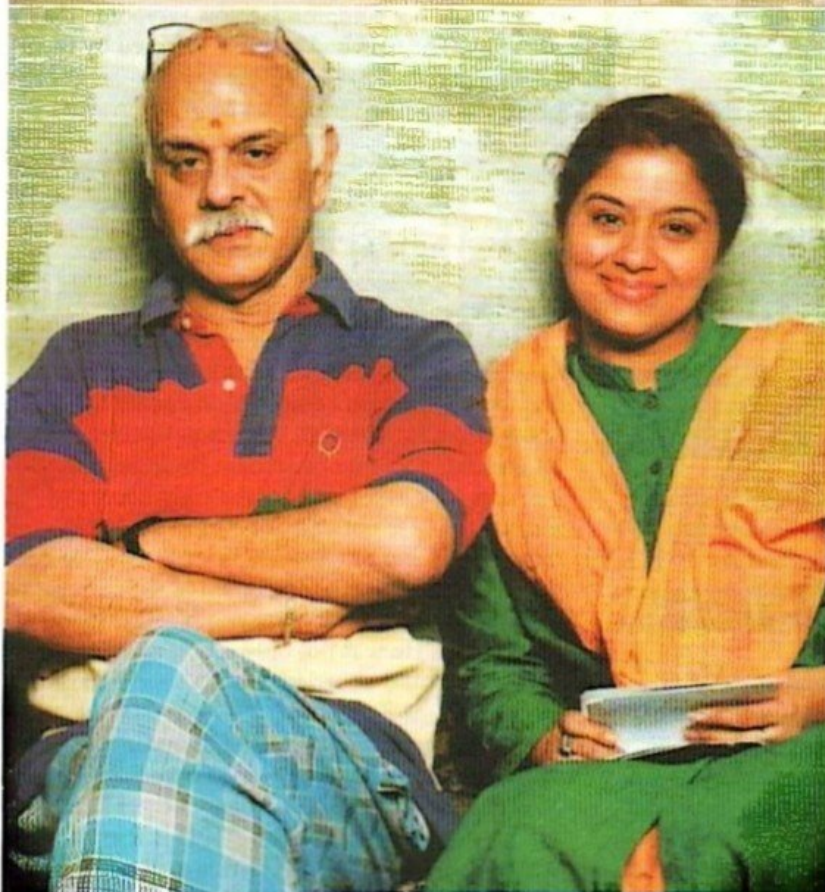
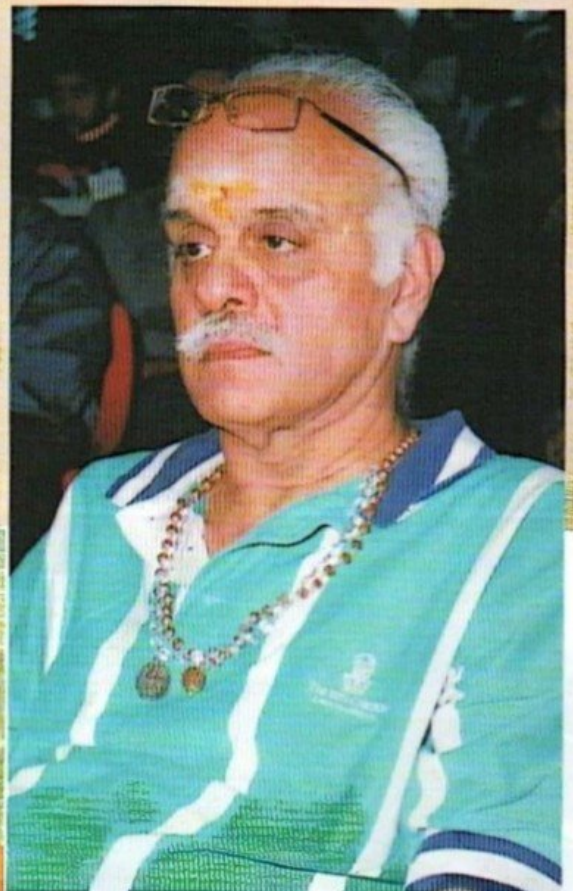


K D Chandran

# A LIFE DEDICATED TO PERFORMING ARTS

- KVS

Kizhakottumadhom Doraiswamy Chandran is a self made man who helped many others to evolve themselves in their chosen field, may it be the career in corporate office, acting in drama, writing plays, poems or scripts or nurturing talents in performing arts. Needless to say, he made his unmistakable stamp on all of them.



Chandran with daughter Sudha

## First Innings

K D Chandran sportingly describes his life so far into three innings of cricket as the game is known for its uncertainty until the innings (he tacitly states that even the cricketing greats Gavaskar and Tendulkar played only two innings in a game) are over. The first one belongs to his life till he leaves for Mumbai, the second his happy family life till his only daughter lost a part of her leg making her and her parents' lives uncertain and the third from the successful management of her life as a fight against the misfortune and being victorious.

Chandran's lineage is drawn from Vayalur village near Trichy in Tamil Nadu but his immediate ancestors are born and brought up in

Irinjalakuda. Chandran was the eldest child of his parents Doraiswamy and Sarada and his siblings are Shanta, Skandan, Ganesan and Kumar. Chandran did his SSLC in Irinjalakuda Boys High School and in his yearning to supplement the family's income, joined typing classes so that he could get a job outside Kerala as the jobs were scarce in Kerala. In his growing years, he learned a lot from his grandfather Swaminathan Iyer. He drew this empathy, acting talents and oratory from grandfather but

Kerala, all his brothers too came to Bombay for their employment.

## Second innings

Chandran's only regret in life was that he married quite early, under the pressure from his mother. She was skeptic that her attractive son would fall for the charms of an American girl working in his office and she had no way of preventing it sitting far away from her son. She had her own reasons for it and Chandran's promises of not looking at any girl (till she dies) would not bring solace to her. To give her peace of mind he married Thangam who, he acknowledged, was his source of strength through thick and thin. She was then an employee of the Handloom House and she resigned her job to become a home maker on arrival of their only child Sudha. Chandran's only sorrow was that she left him suddenly, never to return and he laments her departure and her absence in his life is deeply felt.

Thangam understood and supported Chandran throughout their married life and Chandran thrived in his job with USIS, acting assignments, patronage of theatre and arts and social work.

The fate was unkind to the Chandrans. When Sudha was a student of 12th standard, in a severe accident, she lost part of her right leg but her grit, determination and trust in Murugan, the family's presiding deity, brought her back to a normal life rather made her compromise and overcome the adversity. The pain and anguish suffered by them during the recovery period can only be gauged. But she not only returned to stage, but graduated from Mithibai College and acquired an M A degree in Economics from University of Bombay.

### Work is worship

At his work place, Chandran was very proactive. Chandran had no degree in Library Management but none could beat him as librarian. He practically knows what each book under his care contained and who in the world had the information he needed to update his knowledge. Any person, be he a politician, bureaucrat, a teacher or student could approach him and seek assistance for the right source of information. He not only identified the books they needed and often went out of the way to get the relevant portion photocopied (a technology he had access to before others) and reached them free of cost. He was not only a vast treasure of information and knowledge but a source too for the needy.

The above trait of his helped to nurture friendship with the mighty and powerful. Sharad Pawar, Nani Palkiwala and many others like them utilized his resourcefulness. "This is a great and irreparable loss to us," Palkiwala said when he heard that Chandran was about to retire from USIS Library. The US government honoured him



Chandran with wife Thangam and daughter Sudha



Chandran with his brothers

displayed them only after reaching his dream city Mumbai in 1953. He had a leather bag, two certificates of his qualifications and Rs. 10 in his pocket besides a zeal to find a job soon and grow big while helping his parents in bringing up his siblings at home.

Under the care of his maternal uncle M G Subramanian, Chandran soon gained practical experience and proficiency in local languages. His first job was with American Library at Churchgate and that was his last job too. Changing to other employers was unimaginable as none could match his salary. He joined as a typist and retired as Deputy Library Director of USIS. After completing their education in

with a rare title, seldom given to a non-American, Sustained Superior Performance Award.

## World is a theatre

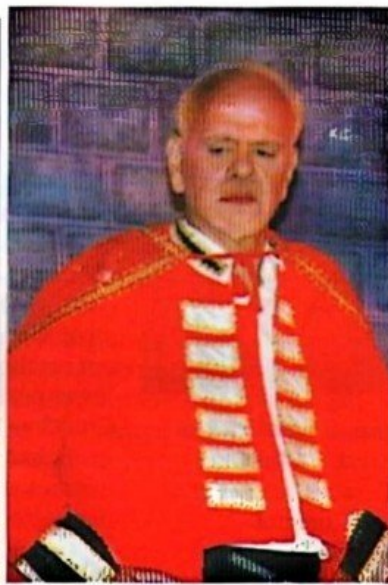
Since his early childhood, Chandran was familiar with the theatre world as all members of his family were lovers, patrons or actors. Since he left native place, he could not participate in



Chandran on the stage



A scene from a movie



From play 'Swathi Tirunal'

plays but his acting talents blossomed soon after he landed in Mumbai. He bemused that he had the audacity to tell his father-in-law-to-be that his first wife was theatre and Thangam would only be the second.

His appearance on stage was in a female part in a drama *Tharangangal* for Goregaon Malayali Samajam anniversary, like that of his uncle

Rajamani. His acting was well appreciated and that caused him to be entrusted with female roles only, until M N Kurup gave him a male role. It was a trail blazer and Chandran was inundated with a male roles but not in the lead. Chandran returned this debt by establishing a body *Nrutya Sindhu* to institute an award named after M N Kurup for theatre personalities of Mumbai. Some of the recipients of this award are V Achuthan, P N Nanappan, Mary Paul and Rajan Kadannappilly. He persuaded and supported Nanappan to found Experimental Playhouse that staged Nanappan's *Kshetram* with Chandran in the title role. Incidentally, *Kshetram* was staged 27 times in various cities and towns of India.

With PMN Menon, N Sadasivan, K N Nair, K G K Nair, V.Rajagopal, R.Narayanan, Adv S.Venkiteswaran, R, Narayanan, G.K.Menon, Vijayan Achath, K.G. Nair (LIC), N.K.Nair; A.G.K.Nair and 7 others, Chandran was instrumental in forming Indian Fine Arts Centre and brought Kalanilayam Theatres from Kerala to introduce their dramas to the Bombay Malayalees. Thus Bombay had the opportunity to witness the gigantic 100x120 feet drama stages with 7000 sitting capacity in open grounds. The plays staged were *Sri Guruvayurappan*, *Katamattathu Kathanar*, *Sri Ayyappan* and *Taj Mahal* and it was a huge hit with the drama loving Malayalees though it did not bring any profits. Between 1969-'80, Kalanilayam staged their plays seven times in Bombay.

From Malayalam stage Chandran moved to Tamil stage when some Tamil theatre lovers formed a play group to which Chandran too was attracted. This motivated him to form a Tamil drama troupe Rangoli. It staged a play every month for some time. When Mundoor Rajan formed Sangam Theatres, Chandran became its patron and encouraged them to stage many plays.

Many titles were given to him by his admirers, such as Tamil-Malayalam Kalathilakam, Nataka Kavalar, Kala Pariposhakan, Tamil Arasan, Malayala Samskarika Nayakan etc.

One thing that continues to burn his mind is that the younger generation does not come forward to take the organizations and other initiatives forward.

## The Social Animal

Continuous interaction with different personalities, events and issues transformed Chandran into a fine orator par excellence and the one most sought after. Once behind the mike, he always spoke in a chaste language be it English, Malayalam or Tamil. He loved debates and discussions with a wider audience and entertained and educated the audience. He never hesitated to call a spade a spade and this characteristic of his made many to think that he was arrogant but those who watched him closely realized that he was very good at public relations.

His friendship circle is vast and it continued to grow wider. His ability to remember names always helped this trait.

He promoted stage artistes, poets, writers etc in Bombay and financially helped those in dire straits. The late P.N. Nanappan in a letter remembered him thus: "ACTOR TO ORGANIZER TO PROMOTER has been a long and eventful journey for Chandran. A true promoter of artistes is a self-sacrificing servant of society. To promote an artiste with the ulterior motive of projecting oneself is sin. For a



In a presentation ceremony



Chandran inaugurating annual event of a Vapi Malayalee Association

promoter to assume the stance of a benefactor distributing largesse is immoral... Chandran imbuing the true spirit of Theatre, has been consistent in promoting actors, directors, musicians, dancers - a whole lot of them, because theatre is the only composite art that includes all crafts and skills. The shy diffident Chandran of 1962 is today a confident, commanding and benevolent personality. Those who have been benefitted by his benevolence are many."

P M N Menon whom Chandran worshipped and revered as Guru, remembered, " Teenagers by dozens got sponsored by the organization (Chandran's Nrityasindhu), several artistes owe

their fame to KDC who even spent his own hard-earned money for the cause of performing art He has done enough and much more for the young and promising talent. Few recognize good and reward the right men, Gratitude is a forgotten word in this modern materialistic world, In this context I would like to place on record the "dialogue" he had with me one whole night in mid-October 1992, It was kind of him to visit me at my home at Guruvayoor after my "stroke" attack, He sworn in the name of Lord Guruvayoorappan that I had inspired him, I am glad he exceeded my expectations, He likened me to Lord Rama while assuming the role of his brother Bharatha!"

### Third innings

Parallel to his official and social life, Chandran along with his wife Thangam had a bitter turmoil on account of their daughter, their only child, Sudha's misfortune with the accident took a couple of years of her life waiting for redressal while the untold story of anguish, agony, trial and tribulation persisted. When Sudha was admitted in a Chennai Hospital for expert treatment immediately after the accident, the doctor in charge of her, expressed his apprehension about gangrene having set in and the remedy against it was to cut off her leg above the knee. Chandran was devastated on hearing it as it would completely eliminate the possibility of going for artificial limb later. He wanted to unload his anger and anguish and rushed to the nearest temple, The Ayyappa Temple in Kodambakkam. While devotees were busy praying, he uncontrollably berated the God for bringing such bizarre situation in their life and asked what sin they committed to have such fate. The unabashed utterances shocked the listening devotees and they tried to pacify him. They empathized with him and send him back to hospital.

On reaching the hospital, a surprise was in store. The doctor informed him that gangrene had not reached above the knee and that only the lower portion needed to be removed. When Chandran narrated this incident, he seemed to be in a trance. The entire India knows the miraculous struggle that Sudha went through, through school text books and the movie *Mayoori* and its various dubbed versions. But there is a small piece of information that is withheld. When Sudha decided to dance again, The Chandrans decided to have it before the very Vayalur Murugan whom they met just before the accident. Without telling anyone, the Chandran family proceeded to Vayalur. Chandran had some lingering doubts in his mind. Why Vayalur Murugan being their family deity allow a tragedy to happen to their daughter and what sin she or her parents did to deserve such a punishment?



Chandran with daughter Sudha and son-in-law Ravi Dang



Wedding Photo

*You gave me food and clothing, a roof  
to take shelter  
A virtuous wife and a darling daughter endowed  
with artistic talents  
Alas, You snatched away her limb relentlessly  
in the game of life  
Nevertheless You made her dance in  
Your temple at Vayalur  
And made her traverse far and wide the  
world over  
You nourished her on time, not revealing  
my assignment  
You gifted peacock to the garden, showered  
rain in the desert  
And installed a generous heart in me to  
promote various artistes  
You made my life legendary and inspired  
my mother  
To sing Your praises O Lord Shanmugha*

.....  
*O Lord of Vayalur, grant me Your benignity  
And insight to carry on my mission  
Appear before me O spear-borne Lord*

Chandran has aptly written some lyrics for a few devotional songs. He wrote lyrics for four Tamil albums (*Vayaluramrutam, Vayalur Murugan Thunai, Vayalur Murugan Pamalai, and Vayalur Murugan Mahimai*) and two Malayalam albums (*Anme Ayyankavilamme, Sangameshwara Saranam*). *The Hindu* in its music review described the albums as "Honey Dews from K D Chandran."

Chandran is also associated with the Concerns, Pravasi Malayalam Sahitya Sangham, The Mumbai Tamil Initiative, Nache Mayuri Dance Academy, Tamil Malayalam Cultural Forum, Harmony, NADE in service of disabled persons, Chandran believes that a leader's job is to show direction and take initiative and it is the duty of others to take that initiative forward and spread it in a progressive direction. He is a little apprehensive about the laxity of the young to move forward socially as they are more concerned about their self promotion and interest.

Diving into the past, Chandran says that several decades ago when Malayalees came to Bombay, there were very few outings for them to provide solace to their inner self and Malayali associations were a refuge station and it helped them to expand their horizons. They also provided an outing for their cultural and social aspirations. At present, the younger generations do not have such urges as they are born and brought up here. Further the secular character of Malayali organisations is no more existing as people started to form groups based on their religion, caste, profession, native place etc and the associations are more financially driven. The present leaders have to seriously think of this situation and give directions to the younger generation, he feels. ■

He decided not to allow Sudha to perform before he got his answers.

At Vayalur Temple, they were surprised to find Madras AIR director and a few crewmen with cameras to videorecord the event. Chandran did not allow them to remain and sent them away. During the pooja, KDC was keenly watching the idol, asking his questions silently and lo! he witnessed tears rolling down from the eyes of the idol. The priest also observed the unthinkable and cried out to Chandran. He got his answers. The God indeed saved Sudha from a bigger tragedy and the price they had to pay was so small in comparison to it. By this time the AIR team returned as if commanded to record the event for posterity.

Before the dance performance, Bombay singer Sivaramakrishnan (Ganesan) rendered a heart breaking keerthana penned by Chandran's close friend the late S Balu. This keerthana had the all the nuances of admiration and submission of the devotee. The English translation by Thodupuzha Sankar of the Tamil lyrics starting with the line *Ulagil ennai padaithai Muruga* is given below:

*Lord Muruga, You have commissioned me  
to this world*