CHAPTER VII

FILM AND THE GOVERNMENT
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This Chapter on "Film and the Government" attempts to explain the kind of services the political parties, which had employed the celluloid medium and the cine artistes for their political propaganda and electoral success, have in turn rendered to the film world, when they were in governmental power.

As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, it has been already pointed out in Chapter III of this thesis, that the Congress Party which was in power in Tamil Nadu right from 1947 to 1967 did not do anything by way of reward to the artistes. During the Independence Movement, both the film and the stage artistes not only involved themselves in the active propaganda of the Indian National Congress but also went to the extent of disobeying the British Raj and courting arrest. The Congress Party in the post-independent era not only failed to realize the influence of cinemas but also ignored the artistes and their film world. For example, in 1939 "Thyagaboomi" produced by no less a person than K. Subramaniam a leading Congressman was banned by the British Government. But the Congress Party which formed the government after independence did not do anything to lift the ban and release the film. In fact, it was only in
1952 that the film was released. But when it was released, it neither attracted a big audience nor was it a success commercially. Similarly, "Veerapandiya Katta Bomman" (1959), a film based on nationalist theme and the life of Katta Bomman who opposed the British rule was produced by a nationalist and a Congressman, P.R. Panthulu. The government failed to give official recognition to this film and did not even exempt this film from commercial tax. The film was not given any special award except the certificate of merit for the best Tamil film.

P.R. Panthulu also produced and directed "Kappalottiya Thamizhan" depicting the life of V.O. Chidambaram (V.O.C.) a great freedom fighter and national hero who, in the beginning of the 20th Century started a Swadeshi (Native) Shipping Company as a counter to the British Shipping Company. V.O.C. had undergone torture and humiliation in the prison under the British regime for defying them. Unable to secure government support and click as a commercial success the film failed and Panthulu later on switched over to the successful task of making purely commercial films. In fact, it was the DMK government which came to power in 1967 that granted tax exemption to "Kappalottiya Thamizhan".

The Congress government was so indifferent towards the artistes that they failed to honour even a
great artiste like T.K. Shanmugam, who lived a Congressman till his death. It was again the DMK which honoured him by nominating him to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Council. The Congress government which had decided in 1949 to award prizes for the best Tamil picture did not implement its decision. It was very unfortunate that K. Kamaraj, the political heir of Sathiyamurthy, and Chief Minister of Madras State from 1954 to 1964, showed least interest in supporting the film artistes of the Congress Party. Even Sivaji Ganesan's nomination to the Parliament in 1982 has come to him rather belatedly.

This was the attitude not only of the Congress in the South but in the North too. The late V.K. Krishna Menon who was elected to the Lok Sabha from Bombay with the popular support of film artistes like Dev Anand, Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar, later refused to help them in anyway. Nor was Jawaharlal Nehru more helpful. Nehru entrusted the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to Dr. Keskar who objected to the leftwing stance of the stars and remained unsympathetic to their problems.¹

When a delegation of Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, B.R. Chopra, Bimal Roy and Rajbans went to see Nehru to plead with him to appoint K.D. Malaviya as the Minister

¹*Imprint*, June 1983.
for Information and Broadcasting Nehru refused to accept their advice. Instead B. Gopala Reddy was appointed.²

The stars had not realized that by embroiling themselves in politics, they ran the risk of making many enemies. For example, Dilip Kumar who did not make any compromise with the rightwing faction of the Congress Party, had to pay heavily for his folly. His first production "Ganga Jamuna" was brutally hacked by the censors on flimsy grounds, because several important politicians wanted to teach him a "lesson". Then, he was accused of being a Pakistani spy without any real evidence. Shantilal Shah, a right-wing Morarji Desai protégé who was the Home Minister of Maharashtra even had him tried on espionage charges.³ Later Morarji's Finance Ministry helped the prosecution. Though he was widely regarded as being among the poorer stars in the film industry (because he made only one film a year) Income Tax Authorities filed several complicated suits against him which took nearly ten years to settle. However, Dilip Kumar went to Uttar Pradesh in 1977 and did his best to re-awaken enthusiasm for Mrs. Gandhi's regime. But from all accounts, Dillip's heart was not in it. His mentor Rajni Patel was victimized by

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
Sanjay Gandhi and the crowd was less than responsive. When Dilip tried to lead his audience through the usual chorus of "Desh Ki Mata - Indira Gandhi", the crowd would shout back "Saira Banu". After Mrs. Gandhi had been defeated, Dilip is reported to have sworn off campaigning forever.

Affected film stars during the Congress regime and especially during the emergency came out openly to oppose Mrs. Gandhi. For example, Dev Anand, Shatrughan Sinha and Amol Palekar openly campaigned for the Janata Party in the 1977 elections. When the Janata Party won the elections in 1977 the new heroes were the Janata Stars. Jayaprakash Narayan himself invited Amol Palekar and others for the swearing in ceremony of the Janata government. Shatrughan Sinha and Dev Anand who attended the swearing in ceremony were mobbed at every meeting.

But history repeated itself. Just as the stars who had believed in Krishna Menon's cause found that no favours were forthcoming from their mentor, the Janata Stars were also in for a shock. Dev Anand had placed all his hopes on "Des Pardes" a film about immigrants to the U.K. He was shattered when he discovered that under the Janata government's censorship policy, the film would get an "Adults Only" Certification, because part of the action took place in a pub. He went to Delhi, placed his case but failed in his mission.
The scheme for providing a subsidy of Rs. 1 lakh to 5 best films was started by the DMK government in 1976.

The AIADMK, which came to power with M.G.R. as the Chief Minister introduced the 'Raja Sendo Prize' (Appendix - 1014) for the eminent film world personalities. The government also relaxed the rules governing theatre construction. As a result, more theatres have come up in the Madurai, Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli, Tanjore and Salem Districts. However, the concentration of theatres in particular area poses a threat to the film producers as they cannot have their film run for longer days.

An interview with a few personalities in the important areas of the film world (See chart 7:1) reveal that the government of Tamil Nadu cannot be even compared to a neighbouring State like Karnataka for the kind of encouragement, monetary and otherwise, given by the government for film production. For the past one decade, the Karnataka Government has been giving a subsidy of Rs. 1.5 lakh to every colour film and Rs. 1 lakh to every black and white film produced in Karnataka State in Kannada Language. It also gives a subsidy of Rs. 50,000 to any film in any language produced in Karnataka State.

According to Valampuri Somanathan, President of the Tamil Film Producers Council in 1982, nearly
40 to 50 Tamil films (most of them colour) with an investment of Rs.2 crores which were certified in 1981 could not be released mainly for want of theatres. According to him, with theatres either not available or available only for a few weeks a year, more than 100 films produced in 1981 ended up in heavy losses amounting to Rs.3 crores. Only 15 films made a profit of about Rs.30 lakhs and the rest broke even.

In cities where there are more theatres than in rural areas, the theatres are booked by the big producers for most of the year. Even if a film by a small producer made an impact it was taken off the circuit, since the theatre is already booked for a big banner. And once forced to withdraw earlier in the city despite the demand, the mofussil areas consider it a flop and no one touches it.

Somanathan hoped the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and the Tamil Nadu government would expedite their proposals to put up theatres in the state to help producers find an outlet. It is a pity that people have to reject films even without seeing them. Hence he suggests that the State Government also provide a subsidy of Rs.1 to 1.5 lakhs for every film produced in the State on the lines of the governments of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka.
It is also to be pointed out here that the financing corporations like Film Financing Corporation (FFC), which is now merged with the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), followed rigid legal rules while recovering the loans from the film producers. This extreme step will be discouraging the talented and promising newcomers whose films would bring credit to the Corporation and to the Indian Cinema. However, the FFC passed a resolution in 1976 that no prosecution for recovery of loans should be launched against those film-makers whose films had won national or international awards or otherwise brought credit to the Indian Cinema. The FFC also was requested to build up its own distribution-exhibition infrastructure. This would at least facilitate the release of their films leaving it to the public to decide their merit.

There is no uniform policy concerning the film world in India. Hence the working group headed by K.S. Karanth in its report submitted in May, 1980 has suggested that "Cinema" should be transferred from the State List to the Union List as it was felt that the Central Government was the most appropriate agency to deal with the film industry. Similar opinion was expressed more than 50 years ago by the Indian Cinematograph Committee popularly known as Rangachariar Committee. Initially, under the
Cinematographic Act of 1918, the Centre had full power in respect of cinema, but subsequently, the licencing power was delegated to the provincial governments. The Ranga- chariar Committee expressed the view that the very characteristic of the film industry made it unsuitable for "Provincialization". But the government took no note of this view and "Cinema" continued to be a provincial subject even under the Government of India Act 1935.

The certifying of films for exhibition was however made a concurrent subject. The same pattern was continued when the constitution was framed, the State Governments being given full powers over the production and exhibition of films within the State, with the centre's power being limited to certifying of films for exhibition.

The Film Enquiry Committee known as the Patil Committee appointed in 1951 had also taken the view that the Centre should have full responsibility for and control over the production of films and that the subject of "Cinema" should be transferred from the State List to the Concurrent List. The centre had accepted this recommendation and even introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha in 1956, but subsequently it backed out.

The examination of the present state of the film industry by the Karanth group has only strengthened
the case for central control made out 30 years ago. Karanth Committee has in particular, found that theatre licencing regulations and high rates of entertainment tax have become serious impediments to the progress of a good cinema industry. Almost all the associations connected with the film industry have represented to the working group that the variation in the general approach and policies over the industry from State to State and even from one local body to another is not conducive to a proper growth of the industry. Interestingly, even a State Film Corporation has pleaded for the transfer of "Cinema" to the Concurrent List.  

Admittedly, a number of State Governments have realized the potentialities of cinema as a medium of mass communication and have taken measures for the development of the industry. For example, at Adyar in Madras, the Film Institute of Technology was set up by the Government of Tamil Nadu. But it has been found that these efforts are marginal considering the role of the films and their substantial tax contribution to the exchequer.

The attempts made by the Centre to bring about national uniformity in regulations concerning the
film industry are also found to have been unsuccessful. An instance, cited by the working group, relates to the exemption from entertainment tax for films which win national or State awards and all children films. Even though this has been agreed to at the conference of State Information Ministers in 1977, the States continue to apply their own criteria for an exemption from entertainment tax. Similarly the states have agreed to pay special attention to the production and exhibition of children's films, but only a few states have actually shown any interest in this direction. The states had also agreed to earmark a specific percentage of revenue derived from entertainment tax for the development of the film industry, but no state except Andhra Pradesh is found to have acted on this. Andhra Pradesh has earmarked 7% of entertainment tax revenues for film development.6 A few other states have started providing a limited amount but not a specified percentage of the entertainment tax revenues. All these have made the working group take the view that the time has come for bringing "Cinema" under Central control.

Similarly it is felt by the film world personalities that there should be a uniform policy for censoring the films. In the absence of such a uniform

6. Ibid.
the revenue as a 'Sleeping Partner' with no investments and with no concern about the losses. On the other hand, the apathy and antipathy of the governments for this industry was well pronounced. It was only after attainment of independence that the governments are showing some symbolic interest. They have, however, beaten all records by taking this industry at all levels and at every available opportunity to the breaking point".  