Early Life and Entry into Film Industry
CHAPTER – I
EARLY LIFE AND ENTRY INTO THE FILM INDUSTRY

Significance of the Trichy

Selvi J. Jayalalitha’s ancestors lived in Srirangam, the delta area of the great Cauvery River, which has its origin in Tala Cauvery of the Coodagu District of Mysore. The fertility of the Tamil country depends largely on the harvests in the Thanjavur district which is richly fed by the waters of the Cauvery. The Tamil people worship the river Cauvery River as goddess and remain ever thankful to it. Since Selvi Jayalalithaa was born in Srirangam, they began to consider that the fertile Cauvery basin had indeed showered its benevolence on them by giving birth to Selvi J Jayalalithaa, so they called her as ‘Cauvery Thandha Kalaimagal’ (Goddess of Art gifted by Cauvery). Rangawamy and Kamalammal, the grand parents of Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa however chose to move out of Srirangam to Nellore in Andhra Pradesh and got established there. The family was a middle class family, they had a son named Srinivasan and three daughters, named Veda, Ambujam, and Padma. Although the family did not starve, Mr. Rangasamy however found it very difficult to make both ends meet, because the family was big and the income was small. As good fortune would have it, when he was forty years of age, he was offered an accountant’s position in The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited in Bangalore. The family immediately shifted from Nellore to Mysore, it was a great turning point in the life of the family and its financial position improved.

Mr. Rangasamy was a strict disciplinarian, he exercised utmost control over his family and enforced the utmost discipline on his children. He gave good education to these children. The eldest child Srinivasan got employed as a draughtsman in H.A.L. soon after completing his education. When the eldest daughter Veda was aged just ten, the family of Dr. Rangachary, which was a well-known family in Mysore approached Rangasamy for the hand of Veda for their son Jayaram. Dr. Rangachary was the family
physician in royal family of Mysore maharaja, Krishna Rajendra Udayar; as the palace surgeon of the royal family, he had attended the birth of the children of the royal family, which included the Hon’ble Jaya Chamaraj Udayar, who later became the Governor of Tamilnadu. Rangasamy initially hesitated over the proposal, because the girl was just ten years old, but considering the lineage of the physician’s family and the condition of his own family which was still trying to make both ends meet, he finally decided to agree to the marriage and on an auspicious day, Veda became Jayaram’s wife, and the daughter-in law of Dr. Rangachary³.

Dr. Rangachary was very rich and influential. He had large properties in Mysore and Bangalore. In Bangalore alone he had two big bungalows named ‘Jaya Vilas’ and ‘Lalitha Vilas, elaborate furniture and huge chandeliers adorned these bungalows. These bungalows were surrounded by acres of flower and fruit gardens. There were a number of servants and attendants to answer the beck and call of the doctor.

There was scarcely anyone who did not know the doctor, he was one of the very important families in Mysore and he was also close to the royal family. Moreover, he had properties in Mysore, Bangalore and Ooty, but Jayaram, the husband of Veda was very senior in age to her, he was very proud and neglected his wife. This was a little unpleasant to Veda, so she diverted her attention to the big library in the family, in order to compensate the studies that she had discontinued with the sixth standard, because of her early marriage. She became a voracious reader and equipped herself with all the knowledge that was made available to her through the library. She appeared for all the exams and passed them all, she became a trained Veena player and also passed courses in typewriting and short-hand. She became an excellent swimmer and a great tennis player. She was a good cyclist and excelled in athletics also. She was the champion in swimming in the Mysore Ladies Club⁴.

Rangachary was very concerned about his son Jayaraman. He was a graduate in arts, but was a not a responsible person, as the child of a rich family, he was more
interested in spending his time in wasteful activities. His father had believed that marriage would make him responsible and family-bound, but marriage failed to make any impact on his life. His father was a strict for the rules, he had run his family like an army man, and he wanted all the house-hold things to be placed in their respective places. He had a strict code of conduct for the children and the servants in the family. He taught them well in dressing themselves properly and equipped them in good manners. As one of the best surgeons in Mysore, he had been awarded the ‘Chipper Field Medal’ also, but this great man was disillusioned by the behaviour of his vagabond son Jayaraman and became sick and bed-ridden. When Veda was just thirteen, she gave birth to her first child, a son. The boy was named Jayakumar. The grandfather was now thrilled by the birth of the baby boy, he briefly recovered from his illness. He enjoyed the new found joy for a shortperiod and after bequeathing a couple of bungalows on the child, he passed away with content.

Jaya ChamarajaUdayar, the prince of the Mysore royal family often visited the family of Dr. Rangachary, he became a play-mate of Sandhya alias Veda who was just ten years old when she had married Jayaraman. Dr. Rangachary used to stock his home with palm-sugarcandy, groundnut candy and other eatables which were the favourite of small children. Sandhya, the young wife of Jayaraman would offer these favourite items to Jaya Chamaraja Udayar\(^5\).

**Birth and Early Childhood**

On the 24\(^{th}\) of February 1948, which was the full moon day of the month of ‘maasi’ and the birth star was ‘magam’ Selvi J Jayalalithaa was born to the couple Veda and Jayaraman. The puranas state that goddess Parvathy Devi was born on such an auspicious moment. The family lived in Mysore at that time. The father Jayaraman was very happy to see his baby daughter who weighed nine pounds and had thick black hair on her lovely head\(^6\).

**Some specialties of the year of birth**
1948, the year of birth of Selvi J Jayalalithaa, goes down in history as a year of some specialities. The independence of India has occurred a year ago, the freedom of the Jewish people, who suffered for over two thousand years had dawned, the birth of a free country for the Jewish people was formed. Burma got its freedom. Rajaji became the Governor-General of India. Columbia Company introduced the gramaphone records and spread a fan club for music. ‘Makkalthilagam’ M. G. Ramachandran’s film ‘Rajakumari’ was released and became box office hit in the cinema theatres. It was remarkable that selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa was born in this year. Her father was thrilled and he declared that his daughter was born with a remarkable horoscope and so she would be a great person in her future. Selvi J Jayalalaithaa was first named Komalavalli, but she was called by the pet-name ‘Ammu’. She had the eyes that sparkled with intelligence and her cheeks were bubbly. Her brother Jayakumar was called by the pet-name ‘pappu’. He showered enormous love on his baby sister. He would take her out in the evenings to get refreshing air. It was his favourite past time. 

Jayaraman, the father continued to lead a reckless life. He spent on his joyful wishes by frequenting entertainment clubs, playing tennis and wasting on pleasure trips. As long as his father was alive, he had fear and respect for him, after his father demise he once again became a slave to his wasteful life. He would go around in his imported car and spend the hard earned money of his father without forethought bar. Veda, Mother of Selvi J Jayalalithaa, became woman of letter by virtue of her voracious reading.

Mother Sandhya pushed to near poverty

Mother Sandhya, who had so long silently born the agony of living with her treacherous husband, now began to instill upon him the kind of life he was leading. She tried to tell him that he was ruining himself and the family. She began to make it clear to him that they had no income coming into the family, and that they had to live within their means. She told him that they should sell their house in Mysore, send the servants home and either go to Bangalore or Srirangam to lead a meaningful life. Selvi Selvi J
Jayalalithaa was a small baby at that time. Sandhya began to learn typewriting and shorthand after the baby went to sleep. She began to realize that she had to work and earn for the family. Her husband was not inclined to go out and find a job for himself, for he had all along led the life of a rich man’s son, moreover he was unable to help his intelligent wife. His sisters also went to the court of law to get a share in the family property. Sandhya now realized that there was no other option but to get an employment in order to take care for the family.

In the year 1950, when Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa was about a year and half, the family was gripped with poverty. Her father had no other option but to send the family to Bangalore. He promised his wife to meet her in a few days after settling the financial problems he was grappling with. But that was not to be, no effort was taken to mend him and he was only found dead after a few days. The doors had to be broken open to retrieve his body. He did not go to Bangalore as he promised his wife, but had only put an end to his life in Mysore itself. For a long time his death remained a mystery, no one knew whether it was caused by heart-attack or otherwise. Mother Veda now had nothing else but the house that was bequeathed on Pappu by his grandfather Rangachary. She returned to her mother’s place with her two children.

Ammu’s grandmother’s house remained a typical middle-class Hindu household. The home would get into full activity early in the morning at four. Grandfather Rangasamy would finish his prayers and come to the table for breakfast. Even at the early hours, the meals had to be prepared in full with all the dishes. Ammu also sat with her grandfather for the meals, after he finished his meals she would go out with him to the door to see him off. She would then sit with her uncle to continue eating. After he left, she would continue with her aunt and after she left, she would continue with her mother Sandhya. After Sandhya also left she would sit with her grandmother to continue her meals, likewise her morning meals would go on from six thirty to eight in the morning. Her mother toiled hard to earn for the family, she worked in the income-tax department, she realized the difficulties experienced by her father, her sisters were of
nubile age and she did not want to be a burden on her father. In spite of the financial difficulties, she brought up her children free from all worries, she wanted her daughter Ammu to shine in the world of music like M. S. Subbulakshmi, or D. K. Pattammal or become a great dancer like Saraswathy or Padmini Krishnamurthy. She had fall dream on her two children than the sky even destiny was to make them women.

Ammu’s mother had great plans for her daughter. She wanted to give her good education and make her a doctor, or a lawyer or an engineer. She felt a career in medicine for her daughter would enable her to serve the people and the society, so she took enormous care in getting them education. She taught her love, compassion and also tireless effort in achieving goals. She told them bed-time stories on these values. As since Ammu grew up nicely tutored on these everlasting values, everybody was sure she would have a great future. 10

**Father’s death and its impact**

Ammu had lost her father at a very early age, she was only a year and a half when he passed away, and she had a hazy remembrance of the day which she recounted later. “The house in Mysore was enveloped in darkness, a dim light was burning in the portico, somebody was carrying her in her arms, and mother was wearing a red cotton saree. A black car was parked outside, inside the car laid a body wrapped in white cloth, it was father’s body, could not remember whether it was the day he died or had returned from a periodical check-up in the hospital and by the side of the car, stood a man holding a dim lantern”. It was remarkable that Ammu could remember such details which happened very early in her life.

After her father’s demise her aunts Jayaseetha and Selvi J Jayalakshmi were not supportive to her mother, instead they only filed cases against her in getting shares from the family property, and they also succeeded by getting the shares. Fortunately a house each in the name of Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa and Jayakumar remained free from litigation. However, her mother did not like to be in Mysore and had come to live with
her father in Bangalore. She got a clerk’s position in the Income Tax department she would leave her two children in the care of her mother and go for work. As she did not wish to be a burden to her father, she worked hard with self confidence in life.\(^{11}\)

**School Days**

Selvi J. Jayalalithaa was admitted to Bishop Cotton Girls High School in then she was a child prodigy in education Bangalore. The school worked till twelve in the afternoon for the elementary section. Ammu did not enjoy her school days in the beginning, but later she got to love the place and her lessons. She looked like a wax doll, with the flowing long hair, big starry eyes and chubby cheeks, so she was fondly called “Ammu” and she was also lovingly called by another name and that was ‘komalavalli’.

Ammu’s maternal aunt Ambuja served as air-hostess in Chennai. She often visited her sister Veda, and ammu had a great attraction towards her. Ambuja also loved her niece Ammu. Ambuja was diagonally opposite to her sister Veda. She never wore a saree like her sister, she always chose to wear dresses that were modern, she had a popped hair, wore short skirts and high heeled sandals, these were considered un-orthodox at that times. Even more, Ammu once noticed her smoking a cigarette and called out loudly to her mother exclaiming “mummy come here, see fire coming out of aunty’s mouth”. This incident created wild laughter and was often quoted many times later, and Ammu ever appeared the same shining beautiful girl.

During the vacations, aunt Ambuja took her niece Ammu to Chennai. Ammu enjoyed these days in her aunt’s place for she always got plenty of chocolates to eat and dozens of new gowns to wear. But the discipline enforcing grandfather Rangasamy did not accept these liberties and stylish life of Ambuja, he often scolded her but Ambuja did not heed to his words, he also did not like Sandhya going for work, he declared that those who did not listen to him had no place in his house. Ammus’ mother Sandhya, aunts Padma, Vidhyavathy, uncle Srinivasan, grandmother Kamalammal were afraid of
this patriarch and lived by his rules, but grand-daughter Ammu enjoyed special privileges even with her stern grandfather Rangasamy.12

Ammu proved to be a child, curious to know many things, once she opened her grandfather’s almirah and discovered his diary. She opened read its contents and filled in the pages with her own accounts in Tamil and Kannada, the two languages she knew at that time. But the stern grandfather excused her with a smile.

While everyone in the house was afraid of grandfather, aunt Ambuja was not at all afraid, she lived her life of free-will. She worked as an air-hostess, on her own, and later joined the film industry by acting in a film titled ‘en veedu’ produced by the veteran V. Nagiahin Tamil and Telugu. It was then that her name was changed to the screen name’ Vidyavathy’. The film was a success and she became a noted actor. She gave up her career in the airline and became a fulltime actress. Selvi J Jayalalitha’s mother Sandhya secretly admired her sister and even envied her life of liberty and luxury, she even felt, had she been as bold as her sister, she would not have to slog in the income-tax office for a small pay. She hopped between Bangalore and Chennai to assist her sister, actress Vidyavathy. She felt she could have taken to acting in her early age itself like her sister and earned a lot of money so that her family could have been free from poverty, but she was not able to go against her father Rangachary.13

A small step towards Chennai

The now noted actor Vidyavathy, who had found herself a place in the film-world became very bussy in her acting schedules, she needed support in her film career and in her personal life, so she wrote to her sister Veda asking her to be close by her side. She wrote to her continuous letters, one of which started like this “my dear sister, you know how busy I am in this film world, I need a trusted hand by my side to look after my film schedules and also to be of great moral support in the family at my home; who else than you can be of help to me during these difficult times of mine? So please come by my side and be of support to me. You are also struggling hard to keep your
family out of financial difficulties by working in the income tax office. If you come here you can also earn more by acting in films and provide well for your family. Veda pondered over this letter and also remembered that when she was young, her father hoping to provide her a comfortable life had put her in his relative’s place, but she was only ill-treated very badly in their home, and so she was recalled home by his father. She thought of those bad days and felt she should provide for her children a comfortable life, with good education, delicious food and all the needs children would ask for she also decided that she should train her daughter Ammu, to become a famous dancer like Saraswathy or Padmini Krishnamoorthy.

Mother Veda wanted to provide the best education for her Ammu, she wanted her to become a doctor, or engineer or lawyer or a scientist, out of these careers, and she thought it would be better if she became a doctor, so that she would serve the sick people. The relatives of the family also thought that Ammu would turn up to be a great person in her future, for she showed to be a promising child.

Vidyavathy’s letter made Veda leave to Chennai with her children Jayakumar and Ammu, she settled in her sister’s place. Aunt Vidyavathy also loved her niece ammu, she would always take the child on her hips and shower kisses on her whenever she found time in-between her film shootings.14

Education in Chennai

The children Jayakumar and Ammu were admitted to in The Holy Angels Convent in Mambalam, Chennai. Care was taken by the mother and the aunt that they were provided equally with the other well-to-do children in the school.15

Aunt Vidyavathy was a little taller and smarter in her appearance than her elder sister Veda, the producers and financiers who came to the house would often mistake Veda to be the younger sister and ask Vidyavathy, why not Veda should also act in movies. KemparajUrs (the brother of later period chief minister of Karnataka Mr.
DevarajUrs) gave Veda a role in his film “Karkottai” and Veda took the name of Sandhya for her career in films. Sadly though she had a beautiful face to act in movies as the heroine, she unfortunately got roles to act as elder sister or as mother, she was very sad about this.\(^{16}\)

As the film career picked up very fast, both the sisters Vindhya and Sandhya became very busy, they found no time to look after the children, they had to be left in the care of the servant maids. At this time one MadhavaMenon, from Kerala, came into the house hold as the car driver, he took great care of the children. He became a part of the family and took great care of the children\(^{17}\)

**Medal winning photo**

When Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa was in her fourth standard, she took part in a dance programme in her school. Sandhya was pleased with the performance. As soon as the function was over, she took her daughter to a photo studio opposite the school and her photographed in the dance costume. A few days afterwards the studio owner, Bhavana Satyam, came to their house with a blown-up photo framed in gold colour and announced that the photo had won a medal in a competition announced by a journal. Sandhya was very happy on hearing this. This photo still adorns the hall in’ Veda Nilayam’ It is to the credit of Selvi J Jayalallithaa that she even as a child won a medal and that was a precursor to her film career. The still Ammu made everybody to freeze in exclander.\(^{18}\)

**Training in Bharatnatyam**

When Ammu was just five years old she was put into bharatnatyam training under the great dance teacher Mr. MuthusamyPillai. He had been the master for Sai-Subbulakshmi, famous dancer of those times. Sandhya wanted her daughter to become a famous dancer like BalaSaraswathy, Padmini or YaminiKrishnamoorthy so that she would probably shine as a great film star in future and earn more money for the family.
They stayed in Gandhi Nagar, Adyar during this period, MuthusamyPillai would visit their house to train Ammu in bharatnatyam, and however Ammu did not like the dance classes because the master MuthusamyPillai was a strict task master, with a stern outlook.

**Fearless Childhood**

Ammu was a fearless child, she did not like the way the dance master taught lessons. He was a tough man with a big moustache, he did not deal tenderly with his students, so Ammu did not like him and so she did not like the dance classes, her mother did not like what her daughter did not want, so the dance classes were passed for a brief while, for she would always complain of some pain in the stomach or in the limbs. Later when her mother became concerned about this, Ammu told her to arrange for a female teacher and so a female dance teacher by name Thulasi was arranged to take dance classes and the training started once again.19

**Back to Bangalore**

Sandhya and Vindhya became very busy with their film shooting, they realized that they could not spend enough time with the children Ammu and Jayakumar, so they decided to send the children to Bangalore and put them under the wing of their grandmother. Soon the children were sent to Bangalore to their grandmother’s house. Jayakumar was put in St. Joseph School and Ammu was put in Bishop Cotton School. Aunt Padma took care of the children. Ammu was sent to school in a car, she was glad to be seen going to school in a car, so if she went to school early, she would not step out of her car until some other children came there to see her getting out of the car, so she would wait with one step in the car with the other outside.20 Ammu’s uncle was in charge of the children, but still Veda would send him rice and other things from Chennai, because she did not want her children to be dependent on their uncle. She never allowed her children to be at the expense of others. Even though the children got all the care, yet they wanted to be with their mother and looked forward to visit Chennai often and when the opportunity
came, they would jump with joy and together with their grandfather would come to the railway station hours before the scheduled departure of the train.\textsuperscript{21}

The summer vacation and the Christmas vacation became a joyas time for the children, for they could visit their mother, and when they had to return to Bangalore for school they were very unhappy. Mother Veda knew that Ammu loved to read books, so she would buy them a lot of comics when they returned to Bangalore. Ammu did a lot of reading and the first Tamil book she read was ‘ChakravartyThirumagan’ written by Rajaji.

Once during her vacation in Chennai, Ammu was tired of waiting for her mother to return from film shooting, rushed to the film studio. There she was noticed by the film director who cast her in the role of child Parvathy in “Sri SailaMahatmiyam”, a Kannada film. She was also given a similar role in another film ‘Sati Rathna’, but she refused to do the role and it went to Pappu, which was the only film, that perfected\textsuperscript{22}.

Ammu had great interest in lyrics of film, so she would listen to film songs that were broadcast in Ceylon Radio, but her grandfather liked only Carnatic classical music and so would change the radio station. Ammu would then go to the lap of her grandmother and listen to the Puranas and Ithikasas, like the Mahabharata and Ramayana told to her by her grandmother. She also taught her a slangs to be recited before going to sleep that would keep her out of fear of the dark night and that was

\begin{verbatim}
“Mullaithandhasudarkodi
Hanumapahikaaval
Sukrivayyasukkvayya
Sukkivariyya”
\end{verbatim}

Ammu recited this slangs every night before she went to sleep. After her lips Murmurmed these slogs, her eyes embrassed sleep\textsuperscript{23}.

Ammu’s class mates presented their teachers with bouquets made of flowers like Coronations, Angraters, Dariang and Lilly, but the flowers blooming in Ammu’s house were the Chennai flowers like Mullai, Arali and Rose which were not suitable to make
bouquets. Ammu was not happy about this, so when her mother came to Bangalore, she would complain to her about this. Sandhya would then take her daughter to Russel market and get the bouquets she required and take her in her car to the school. Ammu was very proud to show to her school mates that she had come to the school with her actress mother, she would wait till her friends noticed her stepping down with her actress mother and she took great pride in doing this. Although it may now appear to be a childish act, it only proves that Ammu took great care in proving to her friends, that she was at least equal to them in her status. But in spite of all this care, Ammu was sometimes unhappy that she was not close to her mother, for she was busy with her film career.

At the age of nine, Ammu was once again initiated into classical dance training. Tmt. LalithaJivan was a jati exponent and under her tutorship Ammu took her lessons. Jaya Vilas resounded with the beating of the Tal and the sound of jatis. The little soft feet of Ammu danced to the Tal of the jatis, with her soft lips mimicking the sangeetaswaras. As the anklets, tied to her ankles, jingled along with the tune, ammu’s mind was always learning for the books she most loved. Her learning for knowledge was more that the shyness expressed through her eyes. This craving for knowledge stood as the basis for all her success in life. Her habit of reading books on various titles booked a bright future towards her career.

Bangalore to Chennai

When Ammu was ten years old, her aunt Padma got married, her grandfather Rangachary also retired from service, grandmother Kamalammal had also grown old and sick, so Rangachary shifted along with his family from Bangalore to Chennai.

Student of Church Park

Sandhya had her residence in MasilamanyMudali Street in T. Nagar, Chennai. Ammu was admitted to the Church Park Convent. She studied in this school till her
sixteenth year, spending six years in the school, while her mother Sandhya was bussy with her shooting schedule. But she felt comfortable as she was in Chennai and was with her mother²⁶. Ammu had a tight schedule, her early morning session began with classes in Carnatic vocal, followed by Tamil language tuition. Then she had to go to school, when she returned she had dance classes with two masters, and then she had to do her home-work lessons, followed by lunch and sleep. This was her daily programme. Her path to success was wet with her valuable sweat.

**Essay competition that won first prize**

Once Ammu won a first prize in the school essay writing competition. The prize was a collection of Shakespeare’s works and a certificate. She wanted to show this to her mother, but she could not see her for more than three days, as her mother was bussy acting in cinema. Ammu sobbed and dried up her eyes and finally after five days, still clutching to her certificate, she lay in the sofa, when her mother woke her up at 12.30 in the midnight. On seeing her, Ammu broke into tears; her mother gathered her up in her arms and showered her with kisses. Ammu showed her the certificate and the Shakespeare collection to her with pride. Sandhya was thrilled. The title of the essay was “What mummy means to me”²⁷

**Her pet animals**

Ammu loved dogs, her favourite was a Pomeranian, it was called ‘Bommulu’. Her maternal aunt Padma had a pet, it was a cat, it was called ‘poottukadai’. The cat loved the home, the dog loved the people. But grandfather Rangachary hated both the animals Ammu loved both, so she had to incur the anger of her grandfather²⁸.

**First Dance Performance**

The dance classes which began at the age of four, continued with her mother’s persistence in Bangalore under the kind guidance of Tmt. Lalitha Durai. Ammu learnt all the intricacies of the art even as a child and she gave a performance at the 60th
birthday celebrations of her grandfather, by dancing to the melodious song of T.A. Maduram, wife of the great comedian and rationalist thinker, actor Kalaivanar N.S. Krishnan.

Nallapenmani…!
Ivalnallapenmani
Thai nattumaanamkaakka
Nadappavalevalo
Avalenallapenmani..!

(IT means that the “good woman is she, whose action would be to protect the honour of her country).

This performance was her first performance. This gave immense pleasure to Sandhya and her grandmother and grandfather. On reaching Chennai she took lessons under two tutors, one of them was the renowned dance teacher K.J. Sarasa. She taught dance to the young Ammu with a motherly love.

Ammu’s first dance performance or ‘Arangetram’ as it is called in bharatnatyam was held in the year 1960, when she was 12 years of age. Sandhya had invited all the V.I.P’s of the film world. The performance was held under the presidency of Nadigar Thilagam Chavalier Shivaji Ganesan and film director K.G. Subramaniam. Nadigar Thilagam showered praise on Ammu stating that she looked like ‘a golden statue’. Padma Subramaniam, the noted dancer was in all praise of her. She stated that “Ammu looked like a lovely laddu” (a sweet-meat round in shape). But Sandhya said that she did not want her daughter to become an actress like her, instead she wanted her to become an I.A.S officer or a leading lawyer. Even her school teachers wanted her to become a researcher and get a Ph.D Degree.

Interest in arts

Ammu had great interest in arts, literature and history. She also had a great interest in performing arts like Bharatnatyam. She was praised widely for her
achievement in the Indian classical dances from the age of twelve and for her achievements in kathakali, kuchipudi, Manipuri and Kathak, the different dance forms in Indian Classical Dance[^31].

**Interest in Sports**

Ammu had great interest in sports; she would play all the games and would be always found in the school playground, she would also encourage her friends in sports. She would play ring-tennis and Kho-Kho. She loved cricket and was a great fan of the great cricketer Nawab Ali Khan Pataudi, whenever cricket was played in Chennai, she would be present with her binoculars and observe the cricketer Pataudi swinging his bat. She cut down the pictures of Pataudi appearing in the journals and pasted them on the walls of her room. Just because Sharmila Tagore was the wife of Pataudi, she became her great fan and began to watch all her movies[^32].

**A poem that brought tears**

Every year mother Sandhya celebrated the birthday of her children in a grand manner. Ammu’s birthday fell on February 24th and Jayakumar’s birthday was on February 26th. So these birthdays were clubbed together and were celebrated on the same day. On one such occasion Ammu presented her mother with a new kind of a gift. She drew a natural scene in which they were birds and natural landscape, in the center of which was pasted a poem. The title of the poem was ‘if you have a mother’ and it had the following lines

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“To my dear mummy
If you have a mother
Treat her with loving care
For you will not know her value
Till you see the empty chair”
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This poem was not written by Selvi J Jayalalithaa, it was a poem her friend had read and got written in her book, Selvi J Jayalalithaa was attracted by the one of the poem and she had used it appropriately. Below the poem she quoted the lines of Pearl S. Buck

Life is so short
Especially when one’s parent’s life is so
Short that not one second of it should
Be wasted or misused.

--Pearl S. Buck

Mother Sandhya was moved to tears on reading these poems; she was overwhelmed by the love and affection her daughter Ammu had for her. She preserved the album like a great treasure.33

Exam time search

When Ammu was studying in school, she would spend all her time in the library reading short stories, essays and novels to enrich her general knowledge, so she would give lesser or no time for her text-books. When the exams approached she would rush for her text books and had to learn all the lessons or the portions for the exams in just one day or one night. In these times her mother would watch her with amusement as she scrambled with her books to learn the year’s portion in a night’s time. But she would encourage her and tell her that she could pass the exams even if she studied just for a night, and that turned out to be true, for even though Ammu studied her lessons in one night, she would pass the exams with good marks as she had a photographic memory.34

Child artiste

During the year 1957-58, when Ammu was studying in Bangalore, Sandhya was acting in the Kannada film ‘Sri SaivaMahathmiyam’. Ammu, who had come for her vacation insisted on seeing the shooting. As the film shooting progressed, it was noted that the child artiste who was to have come for the shooting was sick and could not
report for shooting. The director of the film cast Ammu in the role of child Parvati, he found her very capable and so her role was increased and she was given a song sequence also.  

Sandhya was however not interested in making her daughter an actress like her, for she did not want her to suffer like her. Once she found her daughter applying make-up on her face, she became very angry and slapped her hard. From then on Ammu stopped going to film shootings with her mother. She also stopped watching films, but she could not stop watching Laurel-Hardy films.

Sandhya however put her under dance master K.J. Sarasa to continue her bharatnatyam training. The granddaughter of Seshadri was also a student there. Ammu took her lessons well and in a two years’ time she completed her training.

**Champion Award in School**

Ammu excelled in dance and literary competitions and she received many prizes in the Annual School Day events. The Governor who presided over the function, on seeing Ammu receiving all the prizes told her to stand by his side to receive the prizes, instead of climbing up and down the stage. This incident demonstrated that she was a very successful person and child prodigy even in her early age. Even today her Veda Nilayam is full of all the awards and prizes she won in her career.

**Theatre and Selvi J Jayalalithaa family**

The family of Y.G. Parthasarathy and Y.G. Rajalaxmy run the United Amateur drama troupe. Sandhya and Vidyavathy were associated with this troupe right from its beginning. This troupe staged a number of plays in English. Many of its plays were rehearsed in Sandhya’s house. Y.G.P had noticed Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa even then, she was also introduced to Cho Ramasamy.
Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa in an English play

Y.G.P wanted an English knowing young girl for one of his plays, his immediate choice was Selvi J Jayalalithaa, she made her act in two of his plays, they were ‘The whole Truth’ and ‘The house of August Moon’. Cho Ramasamy was a co-star in these plays.

Mr. SankarGiri, the son of former president V.V. Giri wanted to produce a documentary for the British Council. She made Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa act in this documentary. But soon this documentary grew into a full length film, the shooting went on for a number of months, but this film got released only after Selvi J Jayalalithaa became famous. That was the only English language film she acted, it was titled ‘Epistle’.

Kannada film heroine

During the year 1963-64, when Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa was studying in school, her course of life changed. It was during this period that she acted in a Kannada film ‘ChinnaKombe’ produced by Pantulu. The film shooting was done in Mysore Brindavanam gardens. She just followed what her mother and her director Pantulu told her to do. The film was completed in two years Selvi J Jayalalithaa’s wish was different, she wanted to join college to continue her studies.

Films or Education? Choice to be made

Director Sridhar was looking for a new face for his forthcoming film, he met Sandhya and told her his desire to cast her in his film. Sandhya agreed on the spur of the moment. She had virtually no films herself and the family was again struggling to make both ends meet. Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa only wanted to pursue her education, but her mother explained to her that the family was not doing well economically and that Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa alone could save the family by taking up a film career. Only then she realized that she was not the daughter of a successful film actress, but the
daughter of a struggling small-time actress struggling to get even small or insignificant roles. She had to choose between a film career and higher education, her mother left the choice to her daughter, but she made the financial position clear to her, if she did not act in films, the family would have to suffer economically. Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa was shocked to hear this from her mother, so long she was under a different impression.

**Daughter in age but a mother in maturity**

Selvi J Jayalalithaa weighed the two choices thrown before her, but she made a mature decision, she gave up her dreams of college education, she called her mother and told her that she was ready to act in Sridhar’s film. It was a sacrifice made by her to save her family which now comprised of her grandparents also. She realized only by becoming an actress, she could save her family from poverty and hunger. Her mother Sandhya was moved to tears on seeing her daughter’s responsible decision. Due to this decision, Tamilnadu got a powerful leader where as education loss a an erudite.

The film shooting started in the year 1964. Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa played her role with extreme efficiency that the director was very impressed by her performance. The film was her first film in Tamil and it was titled ‘VenniraAdai, her co-star was Srikanth. Both of them gave excellent performances. Selvi Selvi J Jayalalithaa wanted her mother to see her performance in the shooting schedule itself and appreciate her, so she put all her efficiency in her act. Everybody appreciated her, but there was one person who kept himself aloof from her, it was N.V. Chakravarthy, who was the assistant to the director. He was related to Selvi J Jayalalithaa’s grandfather, but he later made a film ‘titled ‘ThikkuTheriyadhakaattil’ in which he cast Selvi J Jayalalithaa

**Introduction to M.G.R.**

Selvi JJayalallithaa’s mother acted in a small role in the film ‘BagthathThirudan’ in which M.G.R was the hero and Vaijayanthimala was the heroine. Selvi J Jayalalithaa used to go to the film shootings to spend her time during her school vacation. So
M.G.R. came to know of her even when she was just five years old. Then afterwards a function was held in the Government Law College at Chennai, in which Selvi J Jayalalithaa gave a dance performance. M.G.R. was the chief guest in this function. He presented a wrist watch to a boy who gave a mimicry programme and presented to Selvi J Jayalalithaa who also gave a dance programme.

**AyirathilOruvan**

B. R. Pantulu had produced films like ‘Veera Pandiya Kattabomman’ and ‘Kappalottiya Thamizhan’ which had themes of nationalism. The great actor Sivaji Ganesan performed the title roles to much appreciation and was the first actor in India to receive an award for acting, in the Egypt Film Festival. He received the award from President Gamal Abdul Nasser. P.R. Pantulu wanted to make a film with MGR in the lead, to which MGR also consented. This film was ‘Ayirathil Oruvan’, MGR played the hero and Saroja Devi was to be the heroine. But the film director suggested Selvi.J Jayalalithaa’s name to MGR and he liked the idea. So Selvi J Jayalalithaa was made the heroine of the film.  

**Praised by MGR**

During the shooting of the film ‘Ayirathil Oruvan’ MGR observed the excellent performances of Selvi J Jayalalithaa; he even admired her and congratulated her. He observed that she would blossom into a great actress in the Tamil film world.

During the film shooting, senior artistes like M.N. Nambiar and MGR would be present in the sets, but Selvi J Jayalalithaa would be quietly seated in a corner reading books. Her mother would advise her that, she, as an upcoming actress, should get up and pay her respects to the senior artistes. But Selvi J Jayalalithaa would not listen to her mother, she would tell all actors were equally respectable, whether junior or senior and so it was not necessary on her part to get up from her seat whenever a senior actor
appeared on the sets. This incident clearly demonstrates that even from her early days, she stood by her honour and respect.45

India-Pakistan war

War broke out between India and Pakistan, in the year 1965, nationalism was at its peak, people were pouring in their donations to the war and film artistes also jumped into the fray by collecting donations from the people and by giving performances in the border posts to encourage the soldiers.

From Mumbai, a team was sent under Mr. Sunil Dutt. From Chennai, Mr. A.L. Srinivasan and the lyricist Kannadasan arranged for a team. This team consisted of the great south Indian stars and great actor Sivaji Ganesan. The others were Gemini Ganesan, Padmini, Savithiri, Devika, Sandhya and Selvi J Jayalalithaa. They enthralled the soldiers with their encouraging performances on nationalism and fighting spirit for the sake of the nation. While returning to Chennai, the team was given an audience with the then President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan. Selvi J Jayalalithaa danced before the President for a popular film song. Dr. Radhakrishnan liked her and appreciated her. She immediately removed the jewels she was wearing and gave them as contributions to the war. This incident demonstrates that she was patriotic. The same year Selvi J Jayalalithaa was awarded the year’s ‘best new face’ award by the then the Hon’ble Information minister Raj Bahadur46.

Reading habit during film shootings

During film shootings Selvi J Jayalalithaa would always be spending her time reading books. She loved the novels of Charles Dickens, Jane Austen and Sidney Sheldon.

In the year 1965, the introduction of Hindi as the official language was seen by the Tamils as threatening the status of Tamil language and the Tamils. Anti-Hindi sentiments grew and it went up to mount as the anti-Hindi agitation. The whole state
was gripped with this agitation, but MGR and SSR kept away from this agitation as this would affect their film shooting.

**Bold action**

During this time the film shooting of ‘Ayirathil Oruvan’ was taking place in Goa. The film team would stay in Goa and proceed to Karwar, a tiny island early in the morning. One day the film crew mistook another lady for Selvi J Jayalalithaa and took her for film shooting. Realizing this mistake, Selvi J Jayalalithaa reached the island, rowing a small boat, all by herself. This incident demonstrated that she was a very bold woman.

**1966, Successful year**


The leading heroes of the days were Sivaji Ganesan, MGR, SSR and Jaysankar. Selvi J Jayalalithaa teamed as heroine with all these leading heroes. This was considered as a great achievement in those days.

**Tamil hits of Selvi J Jayalalithaa**
An important aspect of this year was that she acted in 15 Tamil films and in 8 of them MGR was the hero. Another important aspect is that, in that year, MGR had acted only in 8 films, which means that the heroine of all his films was none other than Selvi J Jayalalithaa. More importantly from the year 1968 to 1972, she had acted in 50 films, completing a half-century. The same year she acted in a Hindi film ‘Izzat’ also.
As a singer

Selvi J Jayalalithaa sang the song “Ammaen dralanbu” in the film ‘Adimai Penn’, for a song sequence. Her singing and her performance for the scene were widely appreciated and she was seen as an effective singer. MGR encouraged her in all ways, and she became close to him.

There came a time, when even SivajiGanesan and MGR had to wait for her dates. MGR’s ‘Adimai Penn’ and Sivaji’s ‘Deiva Magan’ competed for entry into the Oscar Competition, only Sivaji Ganesan’s ‘Deiva Magan’ succeeded in being sent to the Oscar Competition. But the notable feature is that in these two films, Selvi J Jayalalithaa was the heroine.

Her films with MGR were popular, but only her films with Sivaji Ganesan gave her the opportunity to prove her histry talent. The film ‘Savale Samali’ proved her as a great actor with extraordinary acting ability. In that film she acted in the role of an egoistic girl, brought up in a rich urban household, but by force of circumstances made to marry a village young man. Thereafter the Tamil film world could only think of Selvi J Jayalalithaa for the role of egoistic loss.


AdhiParasakthi and AnnaiVelankanni

‘AdhiParasakthi’ was produced and directed by the famous director K. S. Gopalakrishnan. This was the fourth jubilee hit of his, with Selvi J Jayalalithaa in the
lead role. ‘AnnaiVelankanni’ was produced and directed by the famous dance director Thangappan. In this film she acted with Gemini Ganesan. Both the films were based on devotional themes and were huge hits.

Death of Sandhya

In the year 1971, her mother Sandhya, who was her friend, teacher, father, guide and philosopher passed away after a brief illness. Till she was alive Selvi J Jayalalithaa had not worried about herself, for she knew, there was her mother to take care of her, and she was spending her life in a joyful manner, but her mother’s death came as a bolt from the blue. But MGR came to her help and rescue, he took her under his wings and protected her under his personal care. Her car driver Madhavan was also of great help to her.

Veda Nilayam

Even when she was living in Sivaganam Street in Mambalam, she had purchased a plot of ground in Poes Garden in Chennai. Her mother wanted to construct a beautiful house for her daughter in that ground, but she passed away suddenly. But the loving daughter fulfilled her dream, by constructing a beautiful house in that place and called it ‘Veda Nilayam’. The house warming ceremony was held on 15th May 1972. Many famous personalities like MGR, Chinnappa Devar, Sivaji Ganesan, Muktha Srinivasan, Gemini Ganesan and others from Telugu, Kannada film industry graced the function. Selvi J Jayalalithaa was however sad that her mother was not with her, but she told herself that she would overcome her grief and be a strong lady.

Foreign Travels

Selvi J Jayalalithaa had travelled to Japan, Malaysia and some other south eastern countries in the year 1970, with her mother. She had visited the Japan. Expo Exhibition. In 1972, she participated in the Indian Cultural Show that was held in Singapore. She went along with MGR to Singapore to participate in a cultural

Amidst her tight schedule of acting in films, Selvi J Jayalalithaa was also keen to take part in social service and philanthropic activities. She held a dance troupe and gave a dance programme called ‘Kavirithantha Kalaichelvi’. The programme was held in many places all over Tamil Nadu, and in other countries like Singapore. She also took training in ‘Kuchupidi’. She went to Singapore and performed there also, she enthralled the audience by singing a song which she had sung for one of her films. On 19th July 1972 she left to Penang with MGR’s cultural troupe. After successful performances, she returned to India on 21.7.1972, with MGR.

MGR received the ‘Bharat’ award for his performance in the film ‘Rickshakaran’ in the year 1971. A felicitation function was held by the South Indian Actor’s Association, under the president ship of Sivaji Ganesan. Selvi J Jayalalilthaa proved her eloquent skills in this event by heaping praises on MGR. Her rhetoric was evident when she declared that it was no surprise that MGR was bestowed with the Bharat award, it would be a surprise only if he were not to be bestowed with that award. She quoted the Russian writer Macca Mon stating that “only one who is determined in his ambition can be a great artiste” and MGR had proved it right.  

President’s award

Of the 10 films that she acted in 1972, ten films proved to be hits. ‘Pattikkada Pattanama’, released in this year was a huge success. She had acted pairing with Sivaji Ganesan. Like all her films with Sivaji Ganesan, ‘Pattikkada Pattanama’ gave her immense scope to show her histry skills. This film won her the President’s award and also the ‘Film Fare’ award. Her other films released in this year were ‘Raman thediya Seethai’ and ‘Annam ittakai’. These films had a social consciousness and a social message.
Misunderstanding with MGR

Selvi J Jayalalithaa was scheduled to act with MGR in the film ‘Ulagam Sutrum Vaaliban’. But it was widely rumoured that she was removed with the intervention of Mr. R. M. Veerappan who was the manager, consultant, guide and producer of MGR’s films and also manager of MGR’s ‘Sathya Pictures’. It was also said that Selvi J Jayalalithaa went to Japan to meet MGR while the film’s shooting was on. Because of these happenings a cold war began to exist between Selvi J Jayalalithaa and R.M.Veerappan.

In the year 1972, the film ‘Neerum Neruppum’ was announced. Selvi J Jayalalithaa was to act with MGR. But the elections intervened and MGR had to leave for election meetings. It was rumoured that Mr. R.M.Veerappan had arranged the meetings. Because of the election schedule, MGR’s Call-sheets were cancelled and so were Selvi J Jayalalithaa’s call-sheets. Selvi J Jayalalithaa became miffed because of these happenings. During this time the Tamil Nadu Governments’ Film Awards function was held. MGR took part in the function. He was smiling cordially when all the actors received their prizes and passed by his side, but when Selvi J Jayalalithaa passed by his side, he turned to the other side, obviously to snub her. It became a public matter that MGR and Selvi J Jayalalithaa were not in good terms and MGR had actually snubbed her. Soon after the function, a journalist put a question before function was held. Selvi J Jayalalithaa, and that was “what is the difference between Hindi film actors and Tamil film actors?” As though waiting for this opportunity, Selvi J Jayalalithaa replied that it was like “the difference between democracy and autocracy”. This incident proved to the world that she did not care for anybody, if they snubbed her; even if it was MGR.

She exhibited the same attitude even towards her own films. Once she got up from her seat and walked out of the cinema hall after watching her own movie. She simply said “Oh! I can’t watch this movie”.
Attack by Kannada fanatics

In the year 1972, one of her films ‘Ganga Gowri’ was being shot in KantaVeera Studio, Mysore. At this time, the ‘Kannada Chaluvaligar’ group, under VattalNagaraj, was growing into a linguistic fanatical group, they began to attack non-Kannadigas. They interrupted the film shooting of ‘Ganga Gowri’, because it was a Tamil film. They came to attack Selvi J Jayalalithaa and questioned her whether she was a kannadiga or a Tamil. To this question, she boldly replied “I was born in Mysore, but I am a Tamilian by birth”. They asked her to repeat the slogan “Long lives Kannada, Down with Tamil”. Unperturbed by this group of ruffians, Selvi J Jayalalithaa said she had no problem in saying “Long live Kannada’, but she would not say “Down with Tamil”. She immediately dashed a series of letters to the Chief Ministers of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu bringing this to their notice.

MGR came to Kashmir to act in the film ‘EdaiyaVeenai’. Selvi J Jayalalithaa met him there and joined him in meeting the soldiers in their military camps. Together they gave encouraging speeches to the soldiers.

It was at this time that MGR who so long reigned supreme in the DMK party was removed from the primary membership of the party. Soon afterwards he started the AIADMK party and Selvi J Jayalalithaa who had no film offers for some time, became busy once again.

Appreciation from Periyar

In the year 1973 Selvi J Jayalalithaa acted in a couple of films that highlighted the pride of women, the characters she portrayed demonstrated the will to fight for women’s liberation and to rise against atrocities committed against women. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy who was a votary of women’s liberation appreciated these films, although he always spoke against the cheap popularity of films and the ill effects it created in the society and upon the people who were largely illiterate and under-educated. 53
Film fare award

The popular film journal of Mumbai, ‘Film fare’ selected Selvi J Jayalalithaa for the best actress award for both the Tamil and Telugu film industry for the year 1972. She rode high in the Tamil film industry completing 28 films with MGR.

Her 100th film ‘Thirumangalyam’ was released in the year 1974. For four years, from 1975 to 1979, she stayed out of acting, giving herself the much needed rest from the tight film schedules.

Selvi J Jayalalithaa as a writer

During this time, Cho Ramasamy, her longtime acquaintance, ever since her childhood, encouraged her to contribute to the journal he edited. Selvi J Jayalalithaa proved a great writer, she contributed regularly, writing on various subjects, like history, politics, religion, society, economics and literature. Her writings were well received and appreciated. She also wrote for the other Tamil journals like ‘Bommai’, ‘Kumudam’, ‘IdhayamPesugirathu’ and ‘Thai’.

Back to films

She could no longer stay out of limelight, she once again wanted to face the archlights, but now she had become a forgotten actress, because of her withdrawal from the film world for almost 4 years. But she was determined as ever, she left for the United States, to tone down her body structure which had now lost its shape, she returned trimmed down and started to look for roles in films. ‘Nadhiyaithedi vandhakadal’ which was released in the year 1980 became her last film. She however could not recapture her earlier position as the undisputed heroine of the Tamil Cinema. She now decided to turn her attention to politics and to the ruling party of MGR. 54
Her Political achievement

Selvi J Jayalalithaa who was only born in an ordinary lower middle class family, which struggled to survive and make ends meet, however rose to great heights in the film world, by her hard work and historic talents. She reached great heights, which eluded her actress mother Sandhya. Even though for a short time of her childhood, her family had good earnings, because of her mother’s film career, her family was pushed to near poverty, as soon as her mother’s film career declined. Her mother then disclosed to her that only she could save the family by taking up a film career. Selvi J Jayalalithaa understood her responsibility and took up the challenge of providing for the family which consisted of her long- widowed mother, her aunts, her grandparents and the servants of the household. The training which she took in dancing in all its various forms, like bharatnatyam, oriental, kuchipidi, odissi, kathakali and in singing came to her rescue, to lift her family from poverty and also showed her the way to success.

Selvi J Jayalalithaa rose from the ashes, like a phoenix, to become a star in the political arena of Tamil Nadu and always stood as a great leader, thanks to MGR who took her under his wings, for he knew only a popular actor like him could get the support of the people of the state, who were great film fans. Selvi J Jayalalithaa who as a 16 year stood up to support her family now rose to keep the party of MGR intact and also steer it to power. Her rise and growth is not only phenomenal but also has become proverbial. She stands as a symbol of will power and woman-power. The women of the state see her as the example of the evergrowing influence of women-power and it is the greatest credit she has won in her life. Not only the poor and the under educated people of Tamil Nadu, but also all others look to her, as their savior, equating her to their demi-god MGR. History has always produced the right person at the right time to save the people from depression and now it has produced Selvi J Jayalalithaa, who is lovingly called ‘Amma’ (mother) by her followers.
FOOT NOTES


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