

For almost four decades, Delhi Ganesh has been making thousands of viewers feel good with his simple and realistic acting on stage and in films. Ever since Director K. Balachander introduced him to the film industry through his film “Pattana Pravesham” in 1976, no worthy Tamil film has been complete without Delhi Ganesh’s charismatic presence in a range of supporting roles.

Born in Tirunelveli in 1944, Delhi Ganesh has acted in more than 400 films. He has mostly done positive roles, and is perhaps best known for his portrayals in Kamal Hassan’s comedies and films like “Nayagan” and “Michael Madana Kama Rajan.” He has also done villainous roles in films like “Apoorva Sagodharargal.” His other notable films are “Sindhu Bhairavi”, “Ahaa” and “Thenali.” Television serials with big names have featured Delhi Ganesh in prominent roles.

When eBalak approached the veteran actor for an interview, Delhi Ganesh was busy shooting with Shah Rukh Khan in Pune. Nevertheless, he did not disappoint us and gave us a telephone interview. What better way than to start the New Year with a tete-a-tete with a prolific actor such as Delhi Ganesh! Read on...

1. **Did you always want to be an actor or did it just happen? How did you get the prefix, ‘Delhi.’**

It was not my ambition to become an actor. I was initially working in the Indian Air Force. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, many of our soldiers were wounded and admitted to the Military Hospital. That was the time when there was no television in our country. Hence some of us provided the wounded jawans with entertainment including songs, dance, one act plays, etc. I took part in a stage plays.

After 10 years of service, I came to Madras and took up a job with the Food Corporation of India. I got married and my wife was working in the Accountant General’s office. I was the eldest of a big family; I brought my sister and three brothers to Madras and we all lived together. I started acting in dramas during the evenings. By chance, Director Shri. K. Balachander saw my performance on stage. He liked my acting and introduced me to films. Since I started my acting in Delhi, K. B. Sir named me ‘Delhi’ Ganesh.

2. **What is your mantra for being a successful actor?**

I love my profession. “Work is worship” is my mantra. I am always punctual on the sets. So far, in my 36 years of film career, I have never gone late to work. And then I am not

very exacting in demanding my salary. I adjust with producers. Last but not the least is my talent. I can deliver any lengthy dialogue in just one take.

3. Indian movies, especially South Indian films, are becoming less and less value-based and do not provide healthy entertainment for children. Films like “Apoorva Sahodarargal” and “Anjali” are very rarely made these days. Please comment.

Value-based subjects and children oriented pictures can be produced only once in a while. Every picture cannot be made like "Anjali." Cinema is always commercial. The producer who is investing crores of rupees wants to at least not make any loss if not a very big profit. Only very few educated directors with a good cultural background can give such value-based films, that too not very often.

The government is running the "National Film Institute" which is not a commercial institution. It can fund to produce good films for children. Now we have a host of television channels which can show them to the public and children.

4. Which role do you think has been your best so far?

I cannot name just one film as my best. I got the "Best-actor" award from the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. M. G. Ramachandran, for the film “Pasi” in 1980. I acted as a Chennai rickshaw-wala in the film. My acting was realistic; the public and the press appreciated the dialogues, the body language and the way I rode the cycle-rickshaw. I can never forget that film.

I can further mention my role in "Sindhu Bairavi" where I acted as a mridangam player. The film was directed by Shri K Balachandar. Later all the films with Kamal Hasan - "Nayakan", "Michel Madhana Kamarajan" "Avvai Shanmugi" "Thenali" - brought me applause. Many films directed by Mr. Visu also added feathers to my cap.

5. What type of role is more difficult to do – positive or negative?

A negative role is always more difficult. I am a positive person and doing a positive role is easy and natural for me. Moreover, when you have been doing positive roles all along, the audience finds it difficult to suddenly accept negative acting from you. For instance, I got a lot of brickbats for doing a negative role in the Tamil serial, “Chellamme.” I also have to do a lot of homework before the shooting when I take up negative acting. Anyone can do a positive role, even a negative guy.

6. What would your advice be for children who want to take up acting?

Don't think of acting as a profession while you are studying. First study and qualify yourself for some other profession. Where acting is concerned, there is no prescribed route like there is to become a lawyer or doctor. If it happens, it happens. Don't be dejected if you don't get an opportunity, you always have an alternative profession.

Now there is plenty of scope for children to exhibit their talents on the small screen. Colleges offer visual communication courses. There are so many avenues which we did not have.

In my case, everything just happened. My skill to imitate people led me to acting. One day, when I was in the Air Force, I imitated my physical instructor on the parade ground. He pulled me up and gave me a punishment – to double up. He then asked me to replace another actor on stage which brought me a thumping applause. Although since then, I started acting on stage, I never dreamt I would enter films.

7. Can you tell us about any special moment or episode that you remember or cherish?

During my Air Force career, I once came to my hometown, Sri Vaikuntam. The River Tamiraparani was in spate. I was just 25 years old then. Another young boy was swimming in the floods and a group of young girls were cheering and appreciating him.

I wanted to excel the boy and impress them too. So I jumped into the water and swam across the river to the other shore. The girls were floored and kept cheering me. Without taking even a minute's rest, I began to swim back. In the middle of the water, all my limbs became tired and I began to drown. I could hear the girls shouting out for help.

Somehow I managed to keep my head above the water and by God's grace found a rock. I climbed onto it, rested for a while and slowly swam back. My legs were shivering. I can never forget this episode. I tell my friends to be careful with water and fire wherever they go.

8. How do you keep yourself so active and sprightly even at this age? Is it your Air Force regimen?

Not just the Air Force, I am basically positive my nature and do not harbour jealousies and negative thoughts. I always try to help others and bring cheer wherever I go. I once took the trouble to arrange vegetarian food for ten artistes for 15 days while shooting in Palaghat.

Poet Bharatiyar has said, “If your heart is full of brightness, your life will be bright; if your heart is dark, your life will be dark.” Behave with others in a way that you will be liked by all. It is very difficult to get along with everyone but I am comfortable with that. You are happy when you make others happy.

**9. How different is an actor’s life compared to that of others?**

Celebrities are generally recognized and mobbed by the public for photographs and autographs. It is very difficult to venture out with family even for a shopping spree. There is no privacy.

Once when I visited VGP Golden Beach near Chennai with my family, I was forced to wear a mask to avoid being recognized. Every time I went to a ticket counter for tickets, I would remove my mask and the people at the counter would give me a royal treatment.

**10. Who are your idols in life?**

My father and grandfather! Now I am earning loads of money but my father was an ordinary school teacher in our home town. My mother died when I was just three years old. I had an elder sister and a younger brother. My father married again and they had one daughter and seven sons. So totally we were eleven children.

My father’s only goal was to bring us up well. With his meager salary, he did all that he could for us. After I started working, if I gave him Rs. 1000, he would take only Rs. 500. As a celebrity, I attended a function in our home town and the organizers gave me Rs. 5000 out of which I offered Rs. 2000 to my father, but he refused to accept it.

I learned how to live from him. He was contented, happy and led a simple life. He handled all his problems on his own. I advise my children not to blow up money but help the poor. Partying once in a while is okay but also give charity its due.

**11. How do you unwind after a long day’s shooting?**

I read a lot of books and magazines. I am active on Facebook. About 100 of us from across the world have formed a Facebook Friends Federation through which we collect funds to help in times of calamity.

After the recent Sivakasi fire accident, we collected a lakh and half rupees and presented it to the collector. Some time back, we collected Rs. 75, 000 and gifted it to actor 'Typist' Gopu who was in need of money for a medical treatment.

I act as a judge for 'Pattimandrams' organized in villages. Every month, I write for a magazine published by TAMBRAS and "Mellinam" a magazine published from Sydney. I do not watch television or go for films.