



Director Raj on the sets

An important thing I learnt from Malleasham garu's story is to be humble even after achieving a lot. Apart from Malleasham's persistence, I also admire his humility
— Director Raj

A TALE OF GRIT & GLORY!

The inspirational story of Padmashri awardee Chintakindi Malleasham is all set to come alive on the celluloid soon. Directed by debutant filmmaker Raj R, the movie will recount Malleasham's journey, a school dropout who went on to become an innovator at the age of 26 with his ingenious creation, the Asu Machine (he made the first model in 1999)



Chintakindi Malleasham along with his mother Laxmi

I made this machine for my mother, everybody else from the community benefited from Asu machine, but my mother rarely used it (laughs)
— Chintakindi Malleasham

NAVIN PIVHAL

In this season of biopics, where movies are being made on prominent people from all fields comes 'Malleasham', which is based on the life of Padma Shri awardee Chintakindi Malleasham. The inspiring tale of a Class VI dropout, who went on to become an innovator, and motivational speaker, is helmed by debutant director Raj R, who lives in the US and he shuttled between the two countries to make the film. Actor Priyadarshi Pulkonda is essaying the role of Malleasham and anchor-turned-actor Jhansi is donning the role of Malleasham's mother.

Malleasham, who was born in a weaver's family had to drop out from the school to take care of the family craft; he would help his mother weave Pochampally Ikkat sarees. Making one saree takes a lot of time and intense labour. Seeing his mother struggle to make the 'maggam', the foremost weave to make the saree, Malleasham decided to make a machine to ease her mother's work. However, with no knowledge about engineering and no money, it was a herculean task for him to actually make the machine. With strong determination to help his mother, Malleasham moved to Hyderabad and he used to stay in a one-room house and do odd jobs to support himself and his dream. "I used to live in Ramnagar and work as an electrician, auto driver, etc., during the day time and used to do research to make the machine from the evening. I would get spare parts to study each one, it's their functioning and after seven years of hard work, I was able to make the Asu Machine, which I named after my mother Laxmi."

The machine revolutionised the production of Pochampally Ikat weaves and helped a lot of artisans. For his endeavours, Malleasham received many accolades and awards from the likes of former presidents APJ Abdul Kalam and Pratibha Patil. "After making the machine, I became more responsible. Till now, we made three changes to the Asu machine — it was electronic and now it is coming with a micro-controller. In the latest machine, we have attached a computer to it. From a basic machine to a super advanced apparatus, we have come a long way. I made this machine for my mother, and everybody else from the community benefited from Asu machine, but my mother rarely used it (laughs)."

Now, 46 years old Malleasham has two daughters. "My eldest daughter is in the final year of textile engineering in Tamil Nadu and the younger one will finish



Jhansi and Priyadarshi in 'Malleasham'



Ananya and Priyadarshi in the film

intermediate this year and she aspires to join NIFT. I have enrolled them in these courses so that they could be close to our art and they will also help in reviving this dying art form," Malleasham shares.

About the biopic, Malleasham says, "Well, I am ecstatic about the film. We always hear that a movie has been made on famous people, however, making a film on a common man like me is really a piece of happy news."

Director Raj, who was inspired by Malleasham's story after watching him speak on Ted Talks, decided that the story has to be told to people and he started working on the project. "I was so inspired by Malleasham's Ted talk that it constantly revolved in my mind. A 6th-grade dropout, immigrating to the city, working on odd jobs like driving an autorickshaw, could create an engineering marvel that helped his mother and community. I thought that this is such a powerful story that could inspire the youth of today, just like it inspired me," Raj recalls.

"At first, I wanted to donate a couple of ASU machines, and so I got in touch with Malleasham garu's mentor, Ganesham sir. Brigadier Ganesham runs an organisation called 'Palle Srujana', which helps to find rural innovators and mentor them. Through Brigadier Ganesham, I got in touch with Malleasham garu."

Raj's film will cover 12 years of Malleasham's life, between the late 1980s and

the 1990s. "Raj contacted me about 2-3 years ago and he sent his crew to study me and then they asked my stories from childhood till now, they met all the people whom I know. And they made a story out of it," Malleasham shares.

About the research that went into making the biopic Raj informs, "Research went on for almost six months so we could learn the ikkat art, its intricacies, artisans, their language, their culture etc. Then we also researched to understand the ASU process and study the technical aspects of the machine, the various stages he built the machine, etc."

On Priyadarshi, who is known for his comic roles and choosing him for a

serious role Raj says, "The choice was based on short films that Priyadarshi acted in. I was looking for someone, who has a strong theatre background, and who can pull off this role. I was aware that this decision could backfire as the audience might not accept a comedian doing a lead role. I took the risk and I think it worked out really well."

Malleasham says, "Priyadarshi learnt a few tricks and trades of Pochampally Ikkat and he observed me very carefully. Once he came to my home in Aler and spent a whole day with me. Priyadarshi asked me to do my work as on any regular day and he observed me through out. And I must say that he carried out the role very well. When I watched him on the sets, I saw that he was totally involved in the character."

Renowned artist Laxman Aalay handled the production design to showcase the pastoral side of Nalgonda with authenticity, popular writer from Telangana Peddinti Ashok Kumar has penned dialogues for the movie.

"A few of the cast were from our crew (production designer, Laxman Aalay, dialogue writer, Peddinti Ashok, pro-

duction manager, Kiran) and the lead actress and a few other characters were cast by Mahesh Gangimalla, who is responsible for casting and also training them if necessary," Raj shares.

Recalling a memorable moment from the sets, he relates, "Villagers used to come and complain about our art team taking some of their utensils and not returning them. And they would sometimes react to the scenes and speak and so we had to redo the scenes, but it was all fun."

It took 48 days to shoot 'Malleasham' and it was shot in sync sound in the interiors of Aler and the director is hoping to release the film in April.

I was lucky to find a dream team. Eminent people like Laxman Aalay, who has designed the Telangana State logo, Peddinti Ashok Kumar, who has written more than 200 short stories, Mahesh, a reputed acting coach, Balu and others from FTII and reputed institutes lived with me in a village for more than six months. They slept on the floors with me, ate simple food that was provided without any comforts, just because of a shared passion to tell this story. It was a very happy and satisfying journey and I will cherish it forever. "An important thing I learnt from Malleasham garu's story is to be humble even after achieving a lot. Apart from his persistence, I also

admire his humility," director Raj shares.

Asu machine revolutionised the production of Pochampally Ikkat weaves that helped several other artisans. For his endeavours, Malleasham received many accolades and awards from the likes of former presidents APJ Abdul Kalam and Pratibha Patil



Chintakindi Malleasham with the Asu machine