

## **Pathetic plight of an ultra secularist**

I consider Kamal Haasan as the greatest actor ever born in India. He has acted in hundreds of films in different languages portraying different and complicated characters. He has shown his talent and genius in various films, including a silent movie, not only as an actor but as a script writer, producer, director and dancer. There was not a dull moment in his silent movie “Pushpak” or in “Chachi 420” where he played the role of a comic lady character. He is fully devoted to the art of acting and film making. Money is not the main motivating factor for many of his new ventures as he often takes great risks in depicting some of his unusual roles and themes, like the dwarf in “Appu Raja” or the ten roles that he portrayed in “Dasavataram”. In real life he is said to be a very humble human being. Then why is he getting into controversies all the time? The only problem with him is that he is a self-proclaimed atheist. If somebody has no faith in God, that should not be a problem for others. But the problem began when he started showing Hindu Gods in a negative way in some of his films like “Hey Ram”, “Dasavataram” and “Manmathan Ambu”. Some Hindu organizations protested against his habit of deriving some cruel pleasure out of offensive portrayal of Hindu Gods in his films, but not vehemently enough to enforce a ban.

Kamal Hasaan is closely associated with an NGO called “Harmony India” which was in the forefront in stirring up an agitation against an exhibition of paintings showing the atrocities committed by Aurangazeb in India titled “Aurangazeb-As he was” held at Lalit Kala Academy hall in Chennai and getting the exhibition stalled on March 7, 2008. Aurangazeb’s atrocities are part of proven historical facts. In fact, he was a monster to his own family members as the historical records show that he had imprisoned his own father and had killed two of his own brothers. Obviously Kamal Haasan supported that agitation against the exhibition only to appease the Muslim community. Hindu response to the ban on Aurangazeb exhibition was weak. Hindus are probably more interested in organizing agitations against girls wearing jeans or couples sitting and chatting in the park. Where has Kamal Haasan landed now with his ultra secular views? His latest block-buster movie “Viswarupam” was released in all the southern states, except Tamil Nadu, and in most other parts of India. Where as, in Tamil Nadu, the film was banned by the state government on the basis of state intelligence reports about possible law and order problems over wrong portrayal of Muslims in the film. Everybody in Tamil Nadu knows that this is a silly excuse. The film is running in packed houses in Kerala which has 24% Muslim population, Karnataka with a Muslim population of 12% and Andhra Pradesh with a Muslim population of 12%. How is it that the film has hurt the sentiments of Muslims only in Tamil Nadu which has a Muslim population of hardly 6%?

On January 29, 2013 Kamal Haasan moved the Madras High Court and obtained a stay at 10.15 PM of the order banning “Viswarupam”. Following this order, the Advocate General requested Justice Venkataraman to suspend the Order till 30<sup>th</sup> morning. But, he declined the request. The Advocate General then rushed to the residence of acting chief justice Elipse Dharma Rao, woke him up at midnight and got his approval to move an appeal against the single bench order on 30<sup>th</sup> morning. And accordingly the appeal was filed and the ban on the film was re-imposed on 30<sup>th</sup> morning. The midnight drama made it amply clear that Jayalalitha was bent

upon blocking the film and harassing Kamal Haasan. All sorts of stories were published in Tamil press about the reason for Jayalalitha's vendetta against Kamal Haasan. One such alleged factor is that Kamal Haasan had snubbed a business associate of Jayalalitha who was negotiating with Kamal for the distribution rights of 'Viswarupam'.

A frustrated Kamal Haasan on January 30<sup>th</sup> expressed his anguish and annoyance over the entire episode and reasserted about his secular credentials. He even threatened to leave Tamil Nadu and settle down in some other state or country which is more secular. But even during such a desperate situation, he felt it appropriate to have a dig at the Hindu activists by stating that he was not blaming any particular community for his woes as a great artist like Hussainbhai had also to go into self-exile because of problems created by some other fundamentalist group. On January 31<sup>st</sup>, Jayalalitha issued a statement contradicting all rumours about her alleged grudge against Kamal Haasan and asserting that she was not having any ill-will towards Kamal Haasan. She asked Kamal Haasan to sit with the 28 Muslim groups who were opposed to the release of the film in its original form and reach an amicable settlement for early release of the film. Kamal Haasan responded positively to this offer and eating a humble pie, he sat with the Muslim groups on February 2nd to find an amicable settlement. The Muslim groups wanted removal of 14 offending scenes from the film. After prolonged negotiations, a settlement was reached with Kamal Haasan agreeing to remove seven scenes. Kamal Haasan knew that there was no merit in the arguments of the Muslim groups, as the film is running in packed houses in most other places in the country. But, knowing fully well that they have the support of Jayalalitha, he had to accede to their unreasonable demand. Following the settlement of the issue, the ban on the film was lifted on February 3d. The film was ultimately released in Tamil Nadu on February 7th in a mutilated form with seven cuts. It is pathetic to hear Kamal Haasan now praising Jayalalitha for facilitating the release of "Viswarupam" in Tamil Nadu. He has also withdrawn the petition he had filed in the Madras High Court against the ban on his film.

I consider DMK leader Karunanidhi, who encourages and patronizes all divisive forces in Tamil Nadu, as an anti-national. Jayalalitha is not an anti-national. But she is not only very corrupt, but highly venomous and vindictive. She had demonstrated her vindictive nature to the whole world earlier while dealing with her patron-turned-foe Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati. He has not yet recovered from the shock, agony and humiliation he suffered at her hands. The BJP, which views Jayalalitha as a potential ally in the 2014 elections, has tactfully remained silent in the "Viswarupam" controversy. It is another matter that Kamal Haasan does not deserve the support of Hindutwa forces.

Kamal Haasan often describes Muslim community as his family. Why didn't his "family" come to his rescue in his hour of need? What has he got in return for all the support he extended to them in the past? On the contrary, some Muslim groups went and vandalized some of the theatres in Chennai where posters of "Viswarupam" were exhibited on January 30<sup>th</sup>. Kamal should at least now realize who his "family" is and where his loyalty should be. Kamal Haasan will not suffer any financial loss as a result of the controversy or due to the delayed release of the film in Tamil Nadu. The controversy has brought more publicity to the film and he will get better collection from the rest of India. But he definitely has suffered considerable loss of prestige and humiliation because of the dirty tactics of Jayalalitha. But it is nothing when compared to the plight of Swami Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati. Kamal should take it as a

mild rebuke from the God for some of his actions in the past. He may be an atheist, but God still loves him. Even at the age of 58, if he still looks like a charmingly handsome 30-year old man, it is only because of God's grace and blessings. Good luck to Kamal Haasan