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Gnani: Kalanidhi Maran, the 'desi' Murdoch faces heat

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If the star is fading can the sun be far behind? It must be dawn for the sun every time the stars fade out. But this star and sun are different. The Star is losing the gloss and the Sun is facing the heat!

With international newspapers and television channels covertly celebrating the flak faced by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, every piece of information I get to know about Murdoch gives me a sense of déjà vu. He resembles our own Kalanidhi Maran of the Sun media group, or is it the other way around?

Let us first look at the common points. Both are honchos of huge media empires that have the power to manipulate public and political opinion. Let me not repeat a list of Murdoch's media assets repeated ad nauseum as it is pretty well known at this point. The Sun Network, according to its own website, sounds like a desi competitor to Murdoch's global empire.

And Kalanidhi Maran is as big a billionaire as Rupert Murdoch. Look at the phenomenal growth. He founded Sun TV in April 1993 with an investment of \$86,000 from a bank loan. And within 18 years, he is the 17th richest Indian with a net worth of \$4 billion. He and his wife draw the highest salaries in India's corporate sector.

Both Murdoch and Kalanidhi started with a print publication left to them by their respective fathers. Kalanidhi's father Murasoli Maran was a well-known scriptwriter and publisher of a Tamil weekly magazine besides being a politician and nephew of DMK chief M Karunanidhi.

Like Murdoch, Kalanidhi and his younger brother Dayanidhi, on entering the family business, started expanding the empire by acquiring other publications. Unlike Murdoch who had to depend on non-familial political contacts, the Maran brothers had the advantage of belonging to a political family themselves.

The journalism practised by the Maran brothers was no better than Murdoch's tabloid version. Their weeklies and dailies were full of 'glamorous pictures of film stars and juicy bits about them. Most notorious was the role played by the Maran brothers' run evening Tamil Murasu, which hounded actress Khushboo for her safe sex remarks.

Both this paper and Sun TV sensationalised the protests by the Pattali Makkal Katchi and Viduthalai Siruthaigal taking out processions of donkeys to Khushboo's house. It is quite an irony that few years later Khushboo joined the DMK and became its glamorous campaigner in the last elections which the DMK miserably lost.

The Maran brothers have been accused several times by cable operators that they have engaged goons to cut off cable wires of rival networks. Hathway after several years of struggle competing with the Sun group packed up following one major cable-cut-incident.

Journalists and television staff working for the group have several stories to tell about the feudal treatment and work culture, shocking to find in organisations run by the products of the so-called self respect movement.

Like Murdoch's executives, now the Sun Network's executives are facing the heat. Some years ago Sun group's news editor was arrested by the state government. Now the chief of its film division Hansraj Saxena is in prison following complaints of intimidation and harassment from film producers. Jayalalithaa's police are considering booking him under the notorious Goondas' Act.

Kalanidhi Maran himself has been summoned to meet the police which he has got postponed to this month end. Like Murdoch was summoned by the British parliament over the telephone hacking scandal, Kalanidhi is also likely to be called before the joint parliamentary committee of the Indian parliament over his role in the 2G spectrum scam.

His brother already has lost his ministerial position, following allegations about intimidating Aircel owner Sivasankaran and routing money to the Sun Group.

While Murdoch is already at the witness stand, the Maran brothers have a couple of weeks and months before they hog the limelight for the wrong reasons. But I am sure about one difference in behaviour that one can expect. Murdoch repeatedly apologised for what his group had done. Maran brothers would continue to maintain that they did nothing that warrants an apology to the nation. History is the best judge.

• **Tags:** [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam \(DMK\)](#), [Khushboo](#), [Karunanidhi](#), [Aircel](#), [Rupert Murdoch](#), [Jayalalithaa](#), [Kalanidhi Maran](#), [Sun TV](#), [Sun Network](#), [Tamil Murasu](#), [Murasoli Maran](#), [Pattali Makkal Katchi](#), [Sivasankaran](#), [Sun Group](#), [Hansraj Saxena](#), [Dayanidhi](#), [Viduthalai Siruthaigal](#)

