

inside43

Celebrating the Nilgiris

Summer 2024



A Horse With No Name

Looking at the lives of the Nilgiris race horses

Action Hero

The life and times of a legendary police officer

Walk the Chalk

Meet the snooker queen of the Blue Hills

places to eat

| where to shop

| things to learn

| columns to read



The Bridge to a Perfect Holiday

Named after the famous bridge in Kashmir, Habba Kadal Hotel offers 25 rooms, with a combination of individual suites and apartments, all decorated with handcrafted products, artefacts and natural materials. The hotel has two restaurants, on-site parking, WiFi, every modern amenity, and friendly and personalised service.



Habba Kadal

Hotel. Restaurant. Boutique.

38, Coonoor-Kattabettu-Kotagiri Road,
Yedapalli, Tamil Nadu 643103

☎ +91 76038 21537 www.habbakadal.in

inside43

Publisher

media43 - info@media43.in

Founding Editor

Sangeetha Shinde

Director Operations

David Tee

Director PR, F&B Editor

Deepika Unni

Copy Editors

Dr Susan Sridhar

Sanjana Blades

Editorial Committee

Radhika Shastri, Navroze Sethna, Vijaya

Dar, Dr Suresh Belliraj, Shobana

Chandrashekhar, Anita Davaram

Writers-at-Large

Sreeram Viswanath

Mukund Ravishankar

Contributors

Vijaya Dar, Rohan Mathias, Ishani Dutt

Sarkar, Klouse Bhattacharya, Shobana

Chandrashekhar, Dr (Lt Col) A K Shinde,

Anita Davaram

Photography & Visuals

Klouse Bhattacharya, Suraj Mehboobani,

Babu Dharuman, Jude Angelo

Cover: Timothy A Gonsalves (licence:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

Logistics

Jude Angelo

Legal Advisor

Advocate S Sreekumar

www.inside43.in

Printed at

Chitra Sehar Offset Printers, Sivakasi

Created and designed by

media43

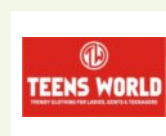
1/121H4 Ralliah Dam Road

Bettati, Kotagiri, Nilgiris

www.media43.in

© 2024 media43

Proud to be supported by...



Our sincerest thanks to our patrons

Hariram Shastri Alka Bharucha Preetham Philip

Ranjit Pratap Dr Chhabra Sati Randhawa

Hema & Vikram Devraj Y's Men Club

Elegant Living By



Established in 2012, United Consultants has been striving to provide homes of the finest quality. Each individual project is nurtured with our personal involvement and undivided attention, with client needs at the heart of all we do. We rigorously pursue environmentally-friendly practices such as minimal earth cutting, rainwater harvesting, and solar energy for electricity generation as well as water heating. We apply the tenets of Vaastu in all our projects. Our portfolio includes several properties for sale in and around Coonoor. They are excellent examples of colonial architecture, while the plots we sell offer unparalleled views of the Nilgiris.

Don't just take our word for it

"Our dream house come true. Thank you team United Consultants."

Brigadier M J Kumar (Retd)

"Brilliant and hassle free experience coupled with SUPERB QUALITY and very reasonable pricing." Anurag Bhatnagar

"Team United Consultants, brilliant quality and FANTASTIC service. Keep up the good work." S Ramnathan

Get in touch to find your perfect place in the Nilgiris.

"Kievcode", Club Road, Coonoor, Nilgiris - 643 101, Tamil Nadu

☎ +91 94877 39875 +91 423 222 1372 www.unitedconsultants.co.in

Life and Living



We've never had a hotter summer in the Nilgiris in all my memory. Rain has been scarce and we've all seen the forest fires that have been raging across the hills in the last couple of months. A drive, deep into the hills, a few weeks ago, showed swathes of scorched land and trees... but in the under-brush I saw that new life was already sprouting forth. And I couldn't help but think that nature has such a way of coming back despite the ravages of man and the vagaries of weather. One doesn't see this in cities, but here in the hills, the ability of life to bounce back is quite remarkable. This quality spills over into human life as well, it seems. There has been so much new growth in the Nilgiris. New restaurants, gated

developments, artistic and social initiatives, new settlers... and we have tried to capture this abundance, yet again, in our summer issue.

We have the knowledgeable Rohan Mathias writing a captivating note about the life of the Dholes. We have two incredibly diverse careers featured - that of the legendary DG Davaram, and the founder of the Nilgiris' own TV channel, Ragam TV. We have covered the history of our beloved Thambis who are such a familiar presence in our hills, and we bring you the story of our very talented artist in residence, Mukesh Munim. Of all the incredible stories of life and living in the hills, the one that definitely needs highlighting is the little village school in Bettati, which has been revamped by The Rotary Club - the work done, and the lives impacted by this upgrade, serve as a model for other communities, and at Inside43, we tip our hats to this magnificent initiative. We have our columnists writing about their experiences and thoughts of living in these hills. The very hills that are home to our international snooker star, Mariam Agnish J, who deserves special mention.

As I go about collecting content and stories for this magazine, I am floored, as always, by the talent and resilience I see in this small district; with the scope of activity and talent they bring to our collective table. It seems adversity brings people together in all sorts of beautiful ways... whether to make education more accessible, to support local businesses or community efforts (like Inside43), to welcome newcomers or put out forest fires. And life keeps springing up in these hills, regardless of setbacks, water shortages or traffic jams. It is such a privilege to be able to chronicle all of this, and we hope you are amazed anew, as I am always, to learn what the Nilgiris has on offer for all of us...

Sangeetha Shinde
Founding Editor



Aloe Vera Based Skincare Products & Personal Care Products

Simply Aloe's journey unfolds like a harmony of green leaves rustling in the wind, echoing the perfect blend of high-content aloe vera and cutting-edge science.

MANUFACTURED & MARKETING BY :

METADERMA
WELLNESS

S-3D, Manchester Square,
12, Puliakulam Road, P. N. Palyam,
Coimbatore - 641 037. Tamil Nadu

98431 40130 | 0422 - 4350085

sales@metadermawellness.com

[simplyaloelife](#)

[simplyalolife](#)

Order now on
www.simplyaloe.in





INFORM

Pg 3: Life and Living

What's in store in Issue 3 about this district and its people

INFOCUS

Pg 8: Action Hero

A resident of the Nilgiris, retired DG of Police, Walter Davaram, adds to the list of famous figures that have called this place home

Pg 12: Channelling Principles

The Nilgiris has had its own local television channel for almost two decades. We talk to A Sampath Kumar about his media initiative and what keeps it, and him, going

Pg 16: La Femme Formidable

Meet Zerina Burns, the lady whose gracious demeanour has earned her the affectionate moniker of 'The Duchess'

INCONVERSATION

Pg 20: Scoring Goals

Football has been a passion with Stephen Aloysius since childhood. Check out the plays he has made in this field in the Nilgiris and beyond

Pg 60: A Life in Service

He has served the district in many capacities. Meet Leo Joseph of Aruvankadu and learn about his life in the MRC and outside

INFLUENCE

Pg 22: School Days

A look at the impressive education project at The Panchayat Union Middle School, Bettati, undertaken by the Rotary Club of Nilgiris and the lives it has impacted

INSCRIBE

Pg 26: An 'Oxygen Manifesto'

Vijaya Dar expresses his concerns for the well-being of this district's fragile ecosystem

Pg 36: The Whistling Hunters

Rohan Mathias, a resident of Masinagudi, gives us a glimpse into the life of the Asiatic Wild Dog, also known as the Dhole

Pg 62: Falling in Love

Ishani Dutt Sarkar tells us of how she came to live in the Nilgiris and why it has such a special place in her heart

INSPIRED

Pg 28: An Artistic Explorer

Mukesh Munim, an artist of repute, an acclaimed photographer and a resident of the Nilgiris, talks to Inside43 about the reasons he is driven to keep creating

Pg 32: In a Heart'beat'

Meet B Sharathbabu, a trained Indian classical musician and teacher from Kalhatty who has marched to his own beat since childhood



CHERRIE BERRY FARM TO TABLE

KALE & AVOCADO SALAD



Kale, Black Dates, Avocado, Toasted Cashew, Pepper & Honey Mustard Dressing

12:00 PM - 9:30 PM

SIGNATURE CRUNCHY AVOCADO ROLL



Tanuki, Avocado, Japanese Mayo, Chilli Garlic

12:00 PM - 9:30 PM

MELONY VIRGIN WHITE SANGRIA



Jasmine Scented Melons, Lime, Apple Juice, Fruits

12:00 PM - 9:30 PM

BISCOFF CHEESECAKE



Creamy Rich Cheese Cake Made With Layer Of Biscoff Spread, Cookie Crumb, Cream Cheese

12:00 PM - 9:30 PM



141, High field Estate, Coonoor 643
101, The Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu



+91 90255 44582

28

**Pg 84: A Horse With No Name**

The plight of race horses requires attention worldwide. Learn about the steps taken in our district to reduce their suffering and create a better environment for all living creatures

INFUSE**Pg 90: Tea Time**

A look at the life and philosophy of Sunil Goyal of Akshaya Tea, who tells us about how he came to the tea industry and what keeps him going

INMEMORIAM**Pg 94: A Continuing Legacy**

The late Dr PC Thomas was an educationist, a philanthropic visionary and guardian angel to a staggering number of people in the Nilgiris and beyond

INSIGHT**Pg 96: The Doctor is (always) In**

Dr (Lt Col) Anil Kumar Shinde needs no introduction in the Nilgiris. Here is a glimpse of his life in the hills in his own words



36

inside43

INHALE**Pg 38: Walk the Chalk**

International award-winning snooker player Mariam Agnish J talks to Inside43 about her career and what she'll be shooting for next

INCREDIBLE**Pg 42: Sunrise, Sunset**

Dawn and dusk in the hills captured by the photographic talent of Suraj Mehboobani

INTIME**Pg 54: The Warriors of Wellington**

A salute to the Madras Regiment, as we take a march through time with the Thambis who live in our midst

INDULGE**Pg 64: In Good Taste**

A round-up of some of the best eating establishments that add flavour and flair to the Blue Hills

INSTORE**Pg 70: Shelf Life**

From tea to tyres, from flowers to fashion, from accessories to art - a look at what's available in stores

INDOORS**Pg 76: On Cloud Nine**

Few colonial homes have been restored as beautifully as this one. We visit Hariram Shastri at his gracious period property in Ooty

INHABIT**Pg 80: Lake Life**

We take a tour of Ooty Lake, our best known water-body, its history and the challenges it has encountered over time

60





**ACTION
HERO**

A resident of the Nilgiris, Walter Davaram adds to the list of famous figures that call this place home. Anita Davaram gives us a snapshot view of her father, the well-known (retired) DG of Police.

Walter Davaram is a legendary figure. His name is synonymous with honesty and leadership, and he is known as a police officer who led from the front. His dignified and gentle persona outside the uniform stands in stark contrast to his iron resolve and determined focus at work. But there are two sides to the same person who served the nation with loyalty and integrity over the course of a career that spanned several decades, and involved events that made national news. He started out wanting to be an army officer, but having sat for the IPS where he stood first in the order of merit, he went on to have a stellar career with the police force.

He served in programmes that were of countrywide import and went on to serve as the Director General of Police for Tamil Nadu. He curbed the Naxal problem during his time as DIG/Vellore Range and Intelligence Unit, and he also is famously known for leading the joint Karnataka and Tamil Nadu mission in order to bring the notorious forest brigand, Veerapan to justice. In addition, he held the post of Vice Chairman of the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu, helping encourage and steer a generation of athletes towards success.

What would you say were your strong points that led to your successes as a police officer?

I was never one for sitting in the office and passing orders. Most of my career saw me posted in districts that had problems such as caste-based violence and riots. I would attribute my success to the fact that I liked leading from the front. I went where my men went, and this gave my staff the confidence and the courage to handle an uprising without worrying about repercussions from departmental or judicial enquiries. This aspect of leadership played a pivotal role in my ability to get things done.

“Most children who grow up in a plantation hill district will always feel the pull of the mountains, and it will forever remain their natural habitat

Tell us something about Davaram, the person, not the well-known police officer.

I am a typical small town boy who grew up in the tea estates of Munnar, studied in estate schools and then in the Munnar Government school. My

passion for sports and adventure stem from walking miles to and from school, being part of the scouts, and spending most of my time outdoors. Reading, and an insatiable thirst for knowledge, is something inculcated in me right from childhood. I guess these are traits integral to me, developed during my time in the hills, and I imagine many boys of my time, with similar backgrounds will share these characteristics. Life was simpler back then, and as a result of my upbringing, I became someone who loved learning, which requires a certain discipline, and this has stayed with me my entire life.

What made you join the police?

As many may know, I did not start out wanting to be a police officer. My first choice was to join the army, which I did. I come from a long line of army officers and I wanted to follow in their footsteps. My grandfather was in the army, my father fought in the second world war, and their careers inspired me. But fate decided otherwise, and when I topped my batch in the IPS exams, I joined the police instead, and there was no looking back.

Do you have any regrets about not joining the army?

None at all. I was able to serve my country to the best of my abilities as a police officer. It was a job that used my love for learning, honed my



strategic capabilities and offered me a diversity of work and situations that appealed to me greatly. While the army would have been good, I think I might have been bored with peacetime operations.

What would you say were the high points of your career?

Every stage of my career has been significant in some way or the other. As I said, it varied from day-to-day. But things that stand out now as we speak - I remember quelling the Cordite Factory (Aruvankadu) riot in 1968 in my first posting as SP of Ooty. Then I led the suppression of the Kisan uprising in Tanjore; and I have, in fact, lost count of the number of times I was involved in controlling communal and religious violence during my career. All that said, I believe the total eradication of the Naxalites in the North Arcot district was one of the most challenging missions I had, and it really stands out in memory. Of course, bringing the number of Veerapan's gang down to five can also be considered one of my greatest achievements.

How have you kept busy after retirement?

Sports, especially athletics, has always been my passion. I have been part of many associations like the Olympic Amateur Athletics. I have been involved in judo and volleyball in various capacities. I may be over 80 now, but I am still actively involved in supporting sporting initiatives wherever and whenever I can.

You wrote a book, "Munnar to Marina" - what inspired this?

Right from the time I retired, friends, colleagues, non-police friends and my juniors, have been telling me to write about my action-packed life. I didn't

really pay much attention to them, and therefore to this idea, as I was busy with my sports commitments, travelling with the various teams to competitions and the related administrative work pertaining to this. Covid, however was the game-changer. Being stuck at home did not sit well with me and I needed to keep myself intellectually busy. A push from an officer who was assigned to me as a camp clerk finally got me started on penning down the memories from my career.



So is the book only a police-related account?

No. The book also has stories from my childhood, and various other details. Of course, the majority of it is about my various assignments and postings. I hope the book will be inspiring to those who read it.

Tell us something about your connection to the Nilgiris and what is special about living here?

I was posted to Ooty, as SP, in 1968. I got married to Prema whose family had lived in the Nilgiris for many





generations. By then my father had retired and the family moved out of Munnar. Though here is very different from Munnar, being a hill boy I felt very much at home in the Nilgiris. Most children who grow up in a plantation or hill district will always feel the pull of the mountains and it will forever remain their natural habitat, even if life takes them all over the world. Marriage, luckily, gave me a base here in the Nilgiris, for which I am extremely grateful. Despite the many changes I have seen over the years, there is still a sense of community here, which I like. No matter what your background or aspirations, this is a place that welcomes all with open arms.

Honestly speaking, if it wasn't for my commitments in Chennai, I would

never leave Coonoor, for this is the place I am glad to call home. ■





CHANNELLING PRINCIPLES

The Nilgiris has had its own local television channel for almost two decades. Sreeram V caught up with the founder of Ragam Television, A Sampath Kumar to talk about his media initiative and what keeps it, and him, going

It takes good people to herald good initiatives. This is certainly true of the flagship local television channel that celebrates 19 years of operation this year. It all began with the vision of one man who launched Ragam TV, prompted by little other than the desire to help those less fortunate.

A Sampath Kumar has been a path-breaker in this district for over two decades, and his unsung good deeds are accompanied with a smile and without any screams for attention. He was, incidentally, the owner of Print Image, the third DTP printing press in the Nilgiris, a place that served as the first computerised press and also an institute that trained people in printing processes.

How it Began

It all started when Sampath was still running the press, something he had been doing for nearly four decades. Being service-oriented from his very early days, he also regularly helped with the blood donation camps and other charitable endeavours around the district. As it always is with the twists and turns of destiny, the connections he built during his volunteering activities led him to an opportunity to help 38 mentally

challenged children in Aravankadu. It was an initiative that had the chairmanship of the Collector and the backing of the National Trust. The teachers who assisted at this home knew his capabilities and requested him to try and raise support for the food and dietary requirements of the children in their care. Sampath readily agreed to help, and all he asked in exchange was to ensure the children were kept safe at all times, as they had a habit of venturing out of the home, and were unable to navigate the world outside safely. He started his work with the home, but soon realised that it required more income than he could provide, and thus was born Ragam TV.

Changing Lives

As he stated in his quiet way, "It was during this time that I was asked if I could start a channel for this district, and I agreed. I thought it would also be a vital source of income to support the home. The timing worked as the district was in need of a local television channel that covered local news in the Nilgiris." When asked if the channel provided sufficient income to support the Home, he states simply, "The channel began as

a free service and continues to be so." However, the advertising revenues that were received provided the additional funding that was required to supplement the needs of the children he was committed to.

While the channel still serves its purpose very well, the home is now part of an undertaking supported by the Rotary Club. The honourable former collector, Archana Patnaik, aided in the transfer of powers as soon as the home stopped receiving funds from the Trust. Sampath remembers that as a challenging phase as the home could not even keep pay their employees. He was keen to take ownership of the home, and it was requested by the management of the home itself, but he faced difficulties with the transfer of ownership as the home was not a Trust. His support for the home continues and Ragam TV's involvement in it is not insignificant to this day.

About the Channel

Ragam TV is a service-based initiative, a local channel that has gone above and beyond the call of its mandate. Sampath recalls that they were fortunate to serve the masses

during the 2009 Nilgiris floods that had ravaged the district, taking lives and livelihoods away from the many that were affected. Ragam TV was the first to provide food supplies to the communities, reaching troubled areas even before the Government. The channel helped to dispel rumours concerning the exaggerated number of deaths in the Kurumba Village Resort. In light of the reach and the scope of work undertaken by Ragam TV, the Government sought the assistance of the channel to identify locations where people might require basic needs.

“A Sampath Kumar has been a path-breaker in this district for over two decades, and his unsung good deeds are accompanied with a smile and without any screams for attention

Ragam TV always focuses on the events and people of this district.



Sampath feels that the talents of this district don't get the opportunities or attention they deserve, which emphasises the need for stronger local attention. "Even before starting this channel, I organised a programme known as Geetham Sangeetham to nurture the singers of this district. I used to shoot eight episodes in one day. I did this for about a year. Around 300 people participated in the very first episode. But I faced a big loss as the channel I worked for let me down. But many people who sing for major competitions now, had participated in Geetham Sangeetham."

The Service Continues

It is worth noting again that Ragam TV is a service-based channel. It is an incredible feat to keep the engine running with income received from advertisements, or, for that matter, any additional income received from printing and designing endeavours. But Sampath's selfless pursuits don't just end with Ragam TV or the care he rendered to needy children at the home. A while ago, he conducted an eye camp with doctors from Ooty's

Eye Foundation, the sole purpose of which was to enable people to do the initial screening. He says in his usual unassuming way, "People refuse to get the initial check done because they fear they may have to pay a small sum, which not everybody can afford. The eye camp sought to remove that barrier and, ultimately, succeeded in its endeavour. At least 80-90 people benefited from the camp."

Ragam TV also had a Corona vaccine camp. During those stressful days Sampath worked with his son to extend support by visiting every hospital, ambulance facility, and funeral area he could. Around 200 people were provided with food and provisions every day during this difficult period when most people chose (or were forced to) stay indoors. Besides this, the TV channel removed the barrier of communication between the Government and the masses by communicating important announcements and advertisements of the Government to the district.

Ragam TV has now partnered with Omega Events to organise an education camp for higher secondary students. The initiative is meant to inspire the overall growth of the students of the Nilgiris.

Family and Support

The support you receive from your family for any endeavour is priceless and is often understated. Sampath's wife, who worked as a staff nurse until they married, has been the backbone of all channel-centric operations. While Sampath kicks off the creative process, she is the one who undertakes the meticulous organisation of a programme.

Together, they have coordinated with 13 Collectors of the Nilgiris with Sampath visiting various events as a motivational speaker. His son now takes care of the business in its entirety. Of course, Sampath is quick to mention his grandfather, who contributed in his own way to the betterment of the district. The monument he constructed is testament to his impactful efforts.

The Challenges

While Sampath works with honesty and dedication to keep his local channel service-oriented, he can't help but feel the sting of those who use less-than-honest means to promote themselves. "There are plenty of initiatives today in the name of trust, but with other agendas."

There was a bus accident in Manthada around five years ago. When Sampath was alerted to the accident, he endeavoured to help with, and cover the rescue operations. He asked the bystanders not to take any footage, but help in whatever way they could. During the rescue, which required the utmost urgency, one individual stood around making a fuss and complaining about everything, while offering no concrete help. This person was, surprisingly, accorded the bravery award for Independence Day. Sampath asserts that such instances of an award going to the wrong hands happens every year and he feels many social

initiatives are borne from the sole aim of profit by those who have the necessary political influence to help them attain their ends. While Ragam TV has access to the Collector, Sampath refused to raise it as an issue, saying this would defy the purpose of his channel, which is to do only good.

Public Service Message

This soft-spoken, yet determined man has a simple and straightforward goal backing the message he wishes to spread. "People here are loaded with talent but are reserved in a few aspects. They should stop being shy when it comes to displaying their capabilities. They say that the people from the Nilgiris are lazy, wake up late, and are sluggish." Sampath says this is not true at all, in his experience, and it is his mission to empower those with talent to develop and recognise their skills. Clearly this is a man who walks the talk. Sampath used to run a spiritual magazine called 'Deivigam' a while back. And he illustrates his views with a personal narrative. "I used to interview many famous personalities back then. I once had an opportunity to interview Nambiar at Ooty's Dasaprakash. He would only eat there when his wife cooked, and she had permission to do so at this catering place. I first approached him, requesting an interview. He agreed to walk and talk with me at 6am the next day, near

About Inside43

"It is incredibly difficult to run a magazine like this, especially in the Nilgiris where things don't hit the limelight the way it deserves. I think the team has done something incredible to have achieved this feat of launching a high-end glossy magazine that showcases the Nilgiris. I hope it will get the support and encouragement it needs to continue."

Deer Park (Maan Poonga). I didn't have a vehicle, or any other means of conveyance back then, and I had to walk. While he assured me that he would pick me up in his vehicle, he didn't. However, I did meet him for the interview at the appointed hour. Only later did he tell me that he asked me to meet at 6am because I am from Ooty and he believed that people here are lazy and can't wake up early. So, I proved to him that while we may wake up late on occasions, we aren't sluggish, and our record of accomplishments proves this."

Ragam TV, under the able guidance of Sampath is always on hand to cover local news. The small studio covers a breadth of subjects that impact the Nilgiris, be it reporting on issues that affect the environment, celebrity visitors, important events, promoting local talent or being the guiding wind for a number of charitable endeavours. More than a local news channel it is living, breathing proof that one man, with a mission, can have far-reaching impact. And that honesty and spirit of service are still alive and thriving in our beloved hills. ■





La Femme Formidable

Zerina Burns is one of the Nilgiris' most colourful characters. Mukund Ravishankar has a chat with the lady whose gracious demeanour has earned her the affectionate moniker of 'The Duchess'

The first impression one gets when one meets Zerina is that of someone who is larger than life.

Her elegant turn of phrase, beautiful clothes that are inevitably accessorised by a signature brooch, and her sparkling eyes make her stand out in any crowd. A dog lover of some distinction, she always has a rescue or two by her side that guard her faithfully; Leah, the lab, is the current fur baby in residence. A dinner or luncheon with her involves heritage crockery, name tags, stunning silverware and a hostess who is a delight to be around. But Zerina is so much more than a sartorially splendid lady or a giver of wonderful parties. She is a wise human being who has a unique take on life, and a remarkable sense of humour that is marked by her dry wit. A conversation with her leaves you wanting more. And more. And more.

Can you tell us a little bit about your connection to the Nilgiris?

My parents had a home here, quite close to Wellington and I got married here, as well. We were married for a long time, but my husband passed away a few years ago. He was very fond of golf and fishing. He's buried in Tiger Hill. He had a disagreement with the priest from All Saints Church a long time ago so we didn't want to bury him there, so now he's resting at the Tiger Hill Cemetery. It's rather funny actually, the way they make the grave. They measure your shoulders a little bit, and then the neck, to get the right angles. Apparently, they take those measurements to gauge how big the grave should be. Once they're dead, of course. We don't bury people alive, I guess.

We spent some time in the UK, but then I moved to Coonoor when I was around 60. I sold the family home and built and moved into the house that I am now in, around September 2015. I spent my time here taking my dogs on a walk in the morning and evening

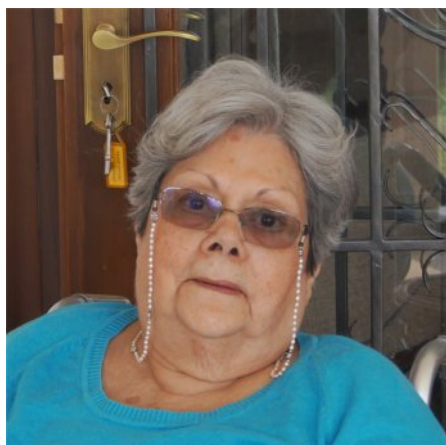
when I was able to, and generally socialising. The social life here is good. It doesn't take too much of planning to get together for dinner compared to the cities I've lived in.

How do you feel Coonoor has changed over the years?

A lot of trees went missing, you see a lot more wild animals roaming around. Leopards, wild boar and bison. Back then, they had enough forests to not venture out. I think that is the biggest change, apart from all the houses.

What are some of your leisure interests?

I haven't been reading much lately, but I read anything I can get my hands on. But my great interest in books was historical novels. They keep you much more absorbed. I always did love history. I really like western classical music and I also love jazz. But not the 'cool' jazz, and not what I call "Ravi, after-he's-had-a-few-drinks-jazz". That I can't stand. I like the sort of music that you can whistle to afterwards.



I moved to Coonoor when I was around 60. I sold the family home and built and moved into the house that I am now in around September 2015. I spent my time here taking my dogs on a walk in the morning and evening when I was able to, and generally socialising.

What advice would you give to the people of Coonoor?

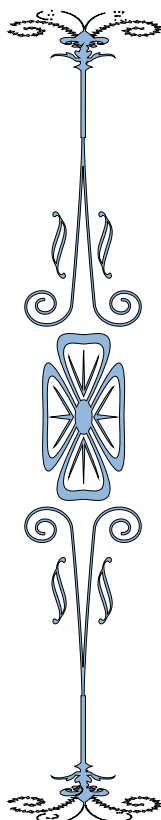
Don't worry about just the size of a house. No one cares about that when you're older. The upkeep can be a nuisance later on. And I've developed a dust allergy. Luckily, I have help that has been with me for over twenty years to keep the house clean. And even more lucky that they stay close by. I believe that you can't live in splendid isolation and have your staff living in Jupiter.

What are your best memories over the course of your life?

I never thought I'd live to be 85, but here I am bumbling along. Old age can be trying sometimes but by and large I can say I've had a good life. You live till 80 and think what interests you the most and think, I've done it all and seen it all and heard it all, and it all becomes a bit of a joke. My family once did a road trip from India to the UK, when I was younger, and when these things were actually possible.

What do you think are principles that someone should live their life by?

I would definitely say, don't hold a grudge or harbour resentment because it will only weaken you. I believe one should not try to be too witty or facetious, it'll only paralyse you. Certainly, if you're angry all the time, you will feel as if you're carrying a great burden. However, if you're full of love, you will be a much lighter person. ■



Men's
Jackets



Vaishali Enterprises

Established in 1989



Nilga Proof
Defies any Weather



Caps



Hand gloves



Mufflers



Sleeveless
Jacket



Trekking
Jacket



Sleeveless
Jacket



Ladies'
Jackets



Cost effective



Overseas grade



Durable



High quality

**Leading suppliers of
protective clothing to the
South Indian Plantations**

Landmark 60 mts from Upper Coonoor Police Station
500mts from Head Post Office, Bedford

☎ 0423-2230283

☎ 9487967314, 9384577224

✉ sales@nilga.co.in

✉ info@nilga.co.in

- **Jackets and woollens** for overseas travel
- **Windcheaters and sweaters** for outdoor and trekking activity
- Manufacturer of customised **jackets**
- **Rainwear for children**
Raincoats and rainsuits for adults
- **Blankets, pouches, bags**

Address

Tea Warehouse Building, 173/3 Gate 3, Brooklands
Road, Coonoor 643101

Scoring Goals

Football has been a passion with him since childhood. Inside43 catches up with Stephen Aloysius to discover the plays he has made in this field in the Nilgiris and beyond



Tell us about your early days in sports...

I was born in Hospital Street in Aruvankadu. Most of the people living in my street were involved in football in some way or the other, and I started playing football at the age of five. I believe I was blessed with some ability in this game. During my eighth standard I left the Nilgiris for the first time to go to Haryana to play in a match. I was nervous as it was my first time travelling alone but this was the beginning of my footballing career.

What were the competitions you participated in?

I represented the state of Tamil Nadu in the Junior Nationals when I was seventeen. Then when I was twenty one, I captained the Youth Nationals team of Tamil Nadu. This was a significant achievement and I am very proud of it. I was also selected to

participate in the sub-junior Indian camp where I was privileged to play and interact with many national players of some renown. A real milestone was when I got to play in the Santosh Trophy, which is one of the most popular and prestigious tournaments of the football circuit in this country.

Were you able to make a living from playing?

My financial background was not very good, and the tournaments were not enough for me to support myself, so I needed a job rather desperately. I discontinued my studies, but my talent for football landed me a job in Coimbatore. I then got married and my football career slowed down a bit as a result of this.

How do you feel about your career at this stage?

I am very proud that a boy from a small village in the Nilgiris, with God's

grace, has reached the heights that I have in football. My name is well-known in Tamil Nadu. I am glad that the passion for football is still strong in me, and I am still actively involved in the game.

How do you feel about your role as a sports teacher?

I work as the table tennis coach at St Joseph's Convent for Girls Higher Secondary School in Coonoor. I also have an academy called Dream Soccer Football Academy, which uses this school's grounds. It makes me so happy to be able to see young children learning to play this game, and to be able to help them learn the skills and discipline that will help them succeed in life. I believe that all children should be encouraged in sports as this will direct the course of their lives in a very positive way. I hope to be able to continue this for as long as God will allow me. ■



De-Rock

Above the Ordinary, Beyond the Clouds

Elevate your senses at De-Rock, a mesmerizing retreat at 6500 ft surrounded by tea gardens, Lambs Rock, and a natural rainforest. Step into an "Island in the Cloud" where every moment is a celebration of nature. Inhale the scents of fresh blooms, drink from pure mountain springs, and witness sunrise magic amidst mountains. Recognized as an Awardee of the "hidden gem of the year" 2023 by MakeMyTrip, in collaboration with Times of India. De-Rock invites you to unwind, embrace humility, and experience the gentle rocking of nature's embrace.





SCHOOL DAYS

Inside43 takes a look at the impressive education project at The Panchayat Union Middle School, Bettati, undertaken by the Rotary Club of Nilgiris



Few places demonstrate the power of community more than the tiny school that sits on the bend of the road at Bettati village in the Nilgiris. What was once a small, ramshackle group of buildings is now a bright and thriving educational institution that has transformed the lives of the students who now love going to school every day.

Every state government has education as a key deliverable, but despite all good intentions, they are unable to cater to their own population. India, as we know, has the largest youth and adolescent population in the world. According to UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund) projections, India will continue to have one of the youngest populations in the world until 2030. However, this is a double-edged sword. While the advantage is the availability of a large and diverse workforce and a larger consumer base, our youth face several developmental challenges, including, but not limited to, access to a good and impactful education and gainful employment.

A School In Need

If one had taken a peek into the small hamlet of Bettati, in the mountains of

the Nilgiris about three years ago, one would have seen students like Hari, Shrithika, Yazhini, Dhanisha, and Maheshwar, children in classes from kindergarten to grade eight, having big hopes and big dreams. Their parents' dreams were even bigger. A good education, good jobs, a chance to rise above the poverty line, a chance to have a good future.

However, the local school, the Panchayat Union Middle School, Bettati, was not adequately equipped to help nurture these dreams. Additionally, the school did not have a full-time English medium teacher, which parents felt was a necessity for a quality education. Many parents had chosen to send their children to schools far away, even willing to incur unaffordable transport costs.

A Call For Help

Teacher, Ms Geeta and Headmistress, Ms Radha, committed educationists were unable to offer the students much, given the state of the school, its classrooms, kitchen, toilets etc. The discouraged faces of their 44 students prompted them to appeal to the Rotary Club of the Nilgiris for some assistance in September 2022. They presented the key issues that needed addressing.



School Library



Science Lab

- Low enrolment of students due to poor infrastructure and no full time English medium teacher.
- Reduced attention span of the children in class due to poor infrastructure like broken classroom walls, inadequate light in classrooms, cold drafts in classrooms due to broken windows and doors etc.
- While the midday meal was being served as per government rules, the mould covering almost every inch of the kitchen increased the risk of long-term health implications for both students and cooks.

A Call Answered

A small group of Rotarians from the Coonoor Chapter went over to the school in October 2022 and were appalled at the conditions in which the students had to study. Most classrooms were unusable, children were sitting on the ground to eat and study, the kitchen was a health hazard, the play area was defunct... yet the children were smiling. Cheerful voices rang out in unison. "Good morning ma'am/sir. How are you ma'am/sir? Have a good day ma'am/sir." The smiles, and their bright eyes, prompted the group to take action and they reported on the situation back to the Club where the merits and demerits of the project were discussed. Challenges were put on the table and carefully considered. Fundraising was discussed. Internal leadership emerged. A core team was formed. A project plan began to come together.

The Money Momentum

Fundraising was a big part of the project. Together with CSR funds

from Kotak Mahindra Prime, Star Chemicals, large contributions from well-wishers and, by using crowdfunding, the Club collected a total of ₹40,86,951 towards the renovation and upgradation of the school. Work commenced in earnest on the following deliverables.

- Civil work in all the school buildings, toilets, roofing, kitchen, building a stage etc.
- Fencing of the school premises for the safety of the children
- Classroom furniture - repairs and new purchases



Classroom before renovation



Classroom after renovation

- Creating a Library and Science Lab with books and equipment
- Building a stage for all co-curricular activities
- Black, white and activity boards as well as rolling white screens for each classroom
- Computer Lab with laptops (both refurbished and newly bought)
- Track suits and shoes for each child
- CCTV cameras for the protection of children and school property

In addition to the works listed above, a new dining area was built by a single donor at a cost of ₹6,70,000, taking the total to ₹47.5 lakhs.

Speedy Results

Within two months, with many man hours spent, along with endless cups of very sweet lemon tea made in the school canteen, and with the incredible support of corporate CSR funds and large-hearted individuals, the Rotary Club of the Nilgiris finished the renovation project and handed the

school premises to the children and the school management on 23rd April 2023. The school had already signed the legal document, taking over the renovated and procured facilities along with the responsibility of utilising them as per the norms laid down by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

This renovation of the school catered to 54 (40 at time of handover) existing students and continues to provide them with a stable, safe and comfortable learning environment. During the facility renovation, faculty morale was at an all-time high and social interactions between students saw new hope and better camaraderie. Since the handover, the admissions went up thanks to better facilities and the hiring of an English teacher. The teachers and Headmistress have a continuing mission to spread the word to the neighbouring areas to increase the student enrolment for future academic years.

Continuing Stimulus

The good work kept up pace, as 80 sports shoes were delivered to the school in June 2023. The remaining funds were earmarked for the English teacher's future salary and other expenses, such as repair contingencies, computer upgrades and more. What started off as a project with modest aspirations, and a total budget of ₹15,00,000 turned into a community-led initiative for a comprehensive upgradation project that cost more than three times the initial amount budgeted. Today, if you drive past the Bettati Toll Gate towards Kotagiri, during the day, you'll see the children playing, singing or marching. If you stop to talk to the

parents who have children attending there, you will most certainly hear the happiness in their voices and see it in their faces.

After all, an education is always more than just a learning of academic subjects. These children are learning to speak an international language, they are learning the value of sports and discipline, they are being schooled for a life that will take them out of scarcity into security, and mostly they have been taught, through example, the importance of service and giving back to the world in meaningful and impactful ways.

The Bettati School is a shining example of the good work undertaken by the Nilgiris Rotary Club. It is also testament to the spirit of the Nilgiris, where community matters, children are cared for in a wholesome manner, and where service to others is the driver of the future. As Nelson Mandela rightly said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." ■

This feature is based on an article written for the Rotary Magazine, by its Editor, Deepika Unni (also F&B critic and PR Director for Inside43).

At time of writing, there were seven children in the 8th grade; three girls and four boys. Stanes School, Coonoor has offered to admit two top performers of Grade 8 into Class 9, with tuition fee waiver as a scholarship. The top two students, both of whom happen to be girls, have secured admission into Stanes School Grade 9. One of them aims to be an IAS officer, while the other one has the ambition to become an army doctor. With the right education at Stanes, it is hoped they will achieve their dreams.

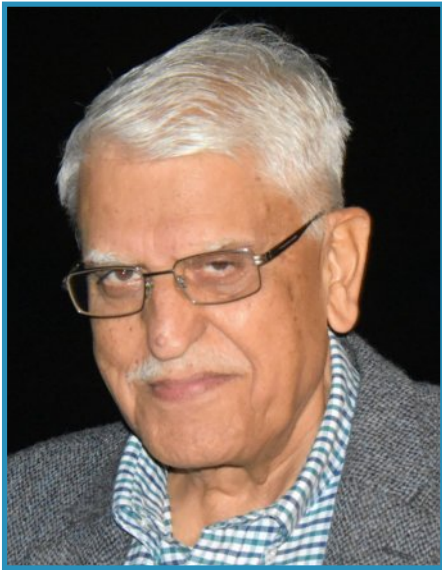
The remaining five children will be placed in other good schools like St Mary's or St Anthony's to give them a chance to achieve their individual dreams.

The Rotary Club of the Nilgiris is looking for sponsors who are willing to give a four year commitment of ₹20,000 per year to educate these children and give them wings to fly.

Please contact **98206 16076** for more information on how to support these students.



Some of the Rotary Club Team



An 'Oxygen Manifesto'

Vijaya Dar has lived in the Nilgiris for close to two decades, moving here after a long and successful corporate career. He expresses his concerns for the well-being of this district's fragile ecosystem

A study conducted by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore concluded that the Todas were already settled in the higher altitudes of the Nilgiris, some 3500 to 4000 years ago. They moved owing to a climate change that occurred around that time in southern India. They originally inhabited lower elevations, but drier climate conditions perhaps made them migrate to cooler and wetter higher reaches of the Nilgiris plateau.

Compared to the Todas (and other communities) I am a newcomer, almost a newborn baby. When I moved from Chennai to Coonoor in 2006, it was perhaps also prompted by climate change as I found the coastal city getting warmer and more humid. The thousands of houses built on its shores had blocked the afternoon sea breeze and the increasing population pressure resulted in the demolition of almost all individual homes that were replaced by multi-storied buildings.

When I moved into Coonoor, I found it to be a sleepy little town, inhabited by some of the friendliest people in the world. From Brooklands, where I

rented my first home, to Bedford market was a pleasant walk. Traffic was minimal, and one could safely take a stroll to Cedric's supermarket and the vegetable lady under his stoep. The air was rich in oxygen, and one could feel one's lungs heaving great sighs of relief. It was easy to get things done. Within a week of our moving into the Brooklands house there was a knock on our door. Two officers from the local ICICI Bank branch wanted to know if we would be requiring the services of a bank, as they had noticed that we were new in town. They said they hadn't seen my car (an old Skoda Octavia) before and assumed that we had only recently arrived. They obliged me by opening an account at my doorstep, after the usual KYC formalities. Similarly, it was so easy to get broadband and landline connections without having to make more than one visit to the BSNL office near Sim's Park.

In these 18 years Coonoor has changed. Dramatically! The number of new homes sprouting up all over the town has changed the soporific pace of life to one of constant activity. Traffic has multiplied

exponentially. Restaurants and eateries have mushroomed, while parking has become a nightmare. Even Kotagiri, which I thought may have escaped this growth, shows similar signs of ravage. Atulya Misra, a senior IAS Officer, writes in his book *Oxygen Manifesto, A Battle for the Environment*, "If one man tries to assert beyond a point, instead of forests we would grow plantations. We will move towards monocultures, devoid of biological diversity."

At the rate at which we are going, we will soon replace our lush plantations with concrete jungles. There will be no land where trees would flower, bear fruits and produce seeds to be planted by future generations. I believe we need an "oxygen manifesto" for our own biosphere. ■



YOUR WARDROBE'S BEST FRIEND

TEENS WORLD

Curated selection of ensembles for MEN, WOMEN & TEENS



We combine quality with affordability and ensure we stock one-off pieces you are unlikely to get elsewhere.

Drop in, and see what you can add to your wardrobe today to dress it up in your own individual style.

Upper Coonoor: 34, Grays Hill, Sims Park Road, Bedford, Coonoor 643101 | Ph: 0423 223 0302

Lower Coonoor: 16/29 Municipal Market, Coonoor 643102 | Ph: 0423 222 2302



An Artistic Explorer

*He's an artist of repute,
an acclaimed
photographer and a
resident of the Nilgiris.
Inside43 caught up
with the life and calling
of Mukesh Munim and
the reasons he is driven
to keep creating*

Mukesh Munim is no newcomer to the Nilgiris. His association with the place goes back to his boyhood when he came on a holiday as far back as 60 years ago. It was a delightful, magical experience for the young boy. Walks in the woods, climbing or shaking the peach, plum and pear trees that grew in abundance in those days, for their fruit. Playing cricket amidst the beautiful flora with local school boys, or walking down from Sims Park to Bedford to the quaint little store to buy delicious chocolates. He had always had an affinity with nature, enjoying the Nilgiris nip in the air, with the scent of eucalyptus wafting through the trees, and the fragrant aroma of tea while passing by a tea factory. "These are all memories, I cherish," he says, his eyes lighting up at the remembrance of those days. The train ride from Mettupalayam to Ooty was definitely a high point on that visit. Everywhere, one saw shades and tints of green, dotted with a few terracotta sloping rooftops of lovely little colonial

cottages and the brilliant, polarised blue skies sans any signs of pollution. The magnificent flower and fruit shows also come vividly to mind. In all his words one sees the artist that was to emerge, as he describes the colour and imagery of the hills of his childhood.

Living the Life

Even in his boyhood he had thought about putting down roots here. And as he puts it, "Someday I should come and live here, and I'm quite sure God silently made a note of that."

Mukesh and his wife, Anjali, came to the Nilgiris for their honeymoon, and as they both fell in love with this place, they made a few more trips subsequently. But it was in 2005 that Mukesh's childhood wish came true. He was ready to end his 20 year career in advertising and editorial photography in Mumbai (at a juncture when digital photography was replacing film) and make a permanent move to these beautiful hills. They bought land, rented a house, and soon construction began

on a home, modelled on a South of France, Provencal-style house, called 'Mon Âme' meaning 'my soul in French. On completion, they quickly moved in and Mukesh ensured he had a well-equipped studio to revive and hone his skills, to draw and paint, an activity that had remained dormant for so many decades in Mumbai. The hectic life in the large metropolis hadn't allowed him to pursue his interest in painting, and so among pristine surroundings, and with time on hand, he was able to begin exploring his artistic calling with the pent-up enthusiasm of years.

The Creative Calling

The deeper he got involved, the more he learned about medium, pigments, colour theory, techniques, solvents, thinners, gums, glues, resins, waxes, safety from toxic chemicals and fire hazards, framing, designing a studio, supports and grounds. He explains further. "Each medium has its uniqueness and each has its own thrill. I have worked with water colours, acrylics, oils, pastels,

charcoal, and encaustic, and have had a lot of fun in the process. For me, my creative journey is about experiencing as much as possible. Every artist seeks to create a unique style and specialisation to be recognised. I took delight in imitating, the brush strokes associated with some great masters, dribbling, painting on canvas like Pollock, using thick, impasto strokes like Vincent, adhering gold leaf like Klimt. I worked with coloured dots to follow Seurat's pointillism."

While Mukesh appreciates all art and all the masters, having only a few preferences, he likes to follow the lives and style of the greats like Turner and Constable, Caravaggio and Rafael, Klimt and Schiele, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Velazquez and Dali, Rembrandt and Vermeer, Ingre and Matisse, Gerome and De Lempicka, Basquiat and Warhol and Jasper Johns... to name a few. In school, he was greatly influenced by the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.

In the 60s and 70s, during the hippie era, he saw a lot of modern art,

psychedelic art, pop art, UV or black light art take centre stage, popularised by the likes of Alex Grey, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Hockney and Peter Max, showing vivid colours, complex 'trippy' experiences and divinely illuminated images. An avid traveller, his journeys to almost 40 countries exposed him to various museums and art galleries, inspiring him to take up a brush as soon as he reached home. He even arranged some special trips relating to art, to countries like France, visiting homes and villages of three great artists; Arles and St Remy where Van Gogh lived and worked, Aix-en-Provence, where Cezanne had his home and studio, and Giverny, of course, to visit the home and garden of the famous Monet.

A Broad Canvas

Mukesh's artistic forays go beyond the two-dimensional. He also enjoys distressing furniture and doing period finishes and effects, and wall finishes. Colour-washing ragging, sponging, marbling, decoupage, stencilling, ageing paint, waxing, lime washing, wood graining, stone work, ageing

metal, Trompe L'oeil, ornamental finishes, and the like, keep him creatively occupied most the of time. "I think I've wanted to be an artist ever since I could hold a pencil. At the age of five, on a Vinayak Chaturthi day, I sat in front of our family Ganesha idol and sketched the deity and that's when my aunt discovered that I had a creative streak and asked my parents to encourage me to develop my skill. This was reinforced when I won an open art competition at school and later a prize for black-and-white photography at the Indo-American Society, Mumbai."

Of course he wasn't allowed to join art school after high school due to the perceived lack of a future in art. So after trying his hand at several professions, he started a career in advertising and editorial photography. His first big break came with Femina magazine (from the Times of India Group), to do fashion features and, in the mid-1990s, had the privilege of shooting Miss India Title winners, the day after their title victories, and a few times thereafter. Mukesh has photographed Madhu Sapre, Sushmita Sen, Sandhya Chib, Shyla Lopez and other famous names during this phase of his career. He then branched out and specialised in food photography, architecture and interiors, and different product photography. He feels privileged to have worked with many Indian and foreign chefs at five-star hotels and restaurants, and took photos for recipe books for Chef Sanjeev Kapoor, Tarla Dalal, and the Godrej Chicken Book. He also undertook architectural and interior photography for some hotels in Goa, and covered some beautiful homes and home accessories in Mumbai.



In the Moment

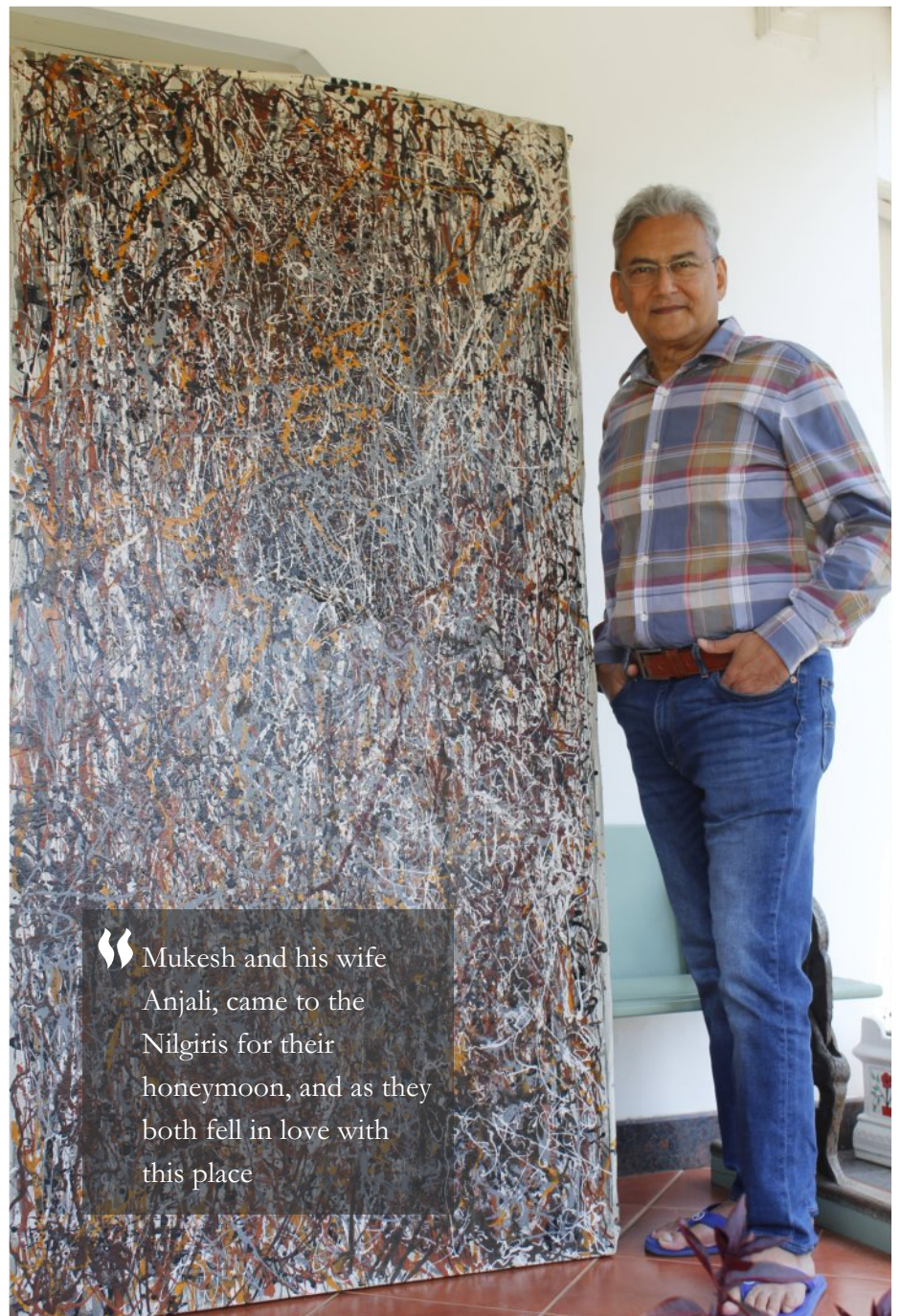
Mukesh is driven by an unstoppable urge to create and experiment when it comes to artistic expression. He recently discovered an ancient medium called *encaustic*. Though a once-archaic medium, it now enjoys popularity with artists around the world. Encaustic comes from the Greek word *enkaustikos*, meaning 'to burn in'. Molten wax is mixed with resin in a specific ratio to make the medium, and then powdered pigment is mixed to the medium to make colours. Melted wax colours are then applied to wood panels to create amazing, colourful paintings that are uniquely expressive. The wax colours are adhered to the surface by using a heat gun and a number of layers can be fused to create depth and dimension. The painting can then be burnished with a soft cloth to create a lovely sheen on the surface. In Greco-Roman Egypt, from the first century BC to second century AD, encaustic was widely employed to paint mummy portraits on wood panels which were attached to mummy sarcophagi in which people were entombed. They were called Fayum portraits and these have survived in perfect condition till today. Mukesh is in thrall with this process, and wants to now explore this medium which is like alchemy, "to transform sweet-smelling beeswax to beautiful works of art."

The Creative Connection

It is only fitting that the Nilgiris is where Mukesh chose to live, to continue his artistic pursuit of divinity and form, for certainly, these hills are one of the finest works of nature's artistry. They serve as a perfect backdrop for an artistic explorer of Mukesh's calibre.

Like all true artists, for him, art is a way of life, a means of being, an extension of philosophy, both personal and universal. He sees the world differently, he looks at life as a creative nuance to be ever-evolving and crafted in stages. As he says most beautifully, "The unmanifest created this manifestation, the Divine dream, Maya. The galaxies, the solar system, stars, planets, black holes,

the earth, colourful life under the ocean, on land. My advice to myself, and to all budding artists would be - look, be aware, observe deeply and be inspired to create like God's little helper. Work, work, work, be fully conscious, draw, paint, make and express fearlessly. Pleasure is in creating, so create, experiment, dabble, tinker, go deeper and deeper and keep learning." ■



“ Mukesh and his wife Anjali, came to the Nilgiris for their honeymoon, and as they both fell in love with this place

IN A HEART 'BEAT'

*These hills have always resonated with music. **Sreeram V** takes us on a journey to meet B Sharathbabu, a trained Indian classical musician and teacher from Kalhatty who has marched to his own beat since childhood*



It is inevitable that our childhood influences us profoundly and shapes our futures. Thus it was for 10-year-old B Sharathbabu, a young boy who loved singing the Nama Sankirtana, that is often sung by the Badagas in their temples.

Sharath was born in the tiny hamlet of Bikketti and is now a resident of the beautiful Badaga village, Kalahatti. His boyhood inspired him to become a Carnatic musician, a singer, and the very first mridangist (one who plays the percussion instrument, mridangam) of the Nilgiris. His is an interesting story, one that speaks of a vast musical repertoire, which originated in the Hattis of the Badagas, and grew and flourished with the guidance of his Gurus and, perhaps, some help from the Divine.

What inspired your musical growth when you were young?

My school years were at the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidhyalaya, an institution under the Ramakrishna Trust. The school is known for its culture of bhajans and prayer. The fascination that began with the Nama Sakirthana further increased during my time there.

Would you say this was the most defining time of your life?

I couldn't say. My childhood in Kalahatti, or my schooling in Ramakrishna Vidhyalaya paved the way for what was to be. It gave me the thirst for music, the longing. But I could not pursue it properly as we, at Kalahatti, barely had access to

regular buses to go anywhere, let alone access to a music teacher. It was during my initial undergraduate studies that I decided on my choice of career. That was the first time that I found a Guru, the late Sri Aiyasami Bhagavadar, who taught me Carnatic music and Keerthanas. After graduating, I decided to pursue a BA in Music (Carnatic vocal as my main topic, and mridangam as an allied subject). This kickstarted my second undergraduate course of study.

Where did you pursue this course?

Sri Sathguru Sangeetha Vidhyalaya, Madurai. The institution was the cornerstone of my music career. I was so blessed to find the perfect Guru, Dr K Thiyagarajan, who is now the Principal of the institution. He was a Guru and a father figure who held my hand, teaching me not only about how to live the life of a musician but instilled in me a way of living that is now an inherent part of me. Much of what I am today is owed to him. The learning process started in both vocal and mridangam. But I got a lot more interested in mridangam. I even started doing concerts with mridangam accompaniments while I was still a student.

When and where did music as a career begin?

It's a tale of luck again. I began my music career in my place of inspiration, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidhyalaya. I served there as a music teacher for four years, from 2007-2011. It gave me an opportunity to express my gratitude to this wonderful institution. In the year 2008, the Culture and Heritage Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu gave me an opportunity to perform in four major Sabhas

across Chennai, Tirunelveli, and Madurai, as a part of a programme that encouraged and promoted upcoming artists.

Did you also have other Gurus and mentors who helped you on your journey?

I also learned vocals from Padmashri Thoppur P Sairam, who is now the Principal of Madras Music College. I specialised in Raga Alaap and the creative music form of Mano Dharma Sangeetha under his tutelage. I am especially glad to have been one of his favoured students. It is said that for you to prosper in any classical art form, be it music or dance, you must have a special connection with the Guru. It is truly a blessing that I had it from all those who taught me music. And this doesn't happen without the blessings of the divine. I also had the opportunity to learn from Madurai Swaminathan, a direct disciple of Madurai Somasundaram Pillai, popularly known as Madurai Somu.



What I consider an achievement is that I am one of the very few Carnatic artists, and the only mridangam artist in the Nilgiris

He is famous for one of his compositions praising Marudhamalai's (a hill temple near Coimbatore) presiding deity, Lord Murugan. The learning process never ends. I am still learning from Prof Sivaramakrishnan, former Principal of Music College,

Coimbatore. He conducts a lot of music festivals in Coimbatore, and I have performed in many of these.

What happened after your post-graduate years?

I came back to Ooty in 2012 as a music graduate to become a part-time music and mridangam teacher. In 2014, I was conferred the Kalai Valarmani by the Government of Tamil Nadu. I now work as a music teacher at the Government School, Sirumugai. I had the opportunity to train and develop many students in vocal and mridangam, both in Ooty, and in Sirumugai. What I consider an achievement is that I am one of the very few Carnatic artists, and the only mridangam artist in the Nilgiris. Though other musicians might be practising the art form here, I am proud to say that I am the first mridangam artist based out of Nilgiris (though I wish more artists would emerge).

Why is it that the Nilgiris has grown only a few Indian classical musicians despite a nurturing environment?

The people of the Nilgiris are known for their devotion. They begin their day with Bhajans (a form of which is Nama Sankirtana). Nama Sankirtana is such a pivotal part of the Badaga community, and even the Nilgiris as a whole. Everyone, from five-year-old children to the elderly, have a sense of Thala (Carnatic music beats). There are plenty of Bhakti Margams (ways of faith) in the Nilgiris. But not everyone gets a fine teacher who can help them imbibe these Margams and make a musical career out of it. It took me 22 years to achieve this. Not everyone might be that fortunate. Even now, the number of music teachers, especially teachers who

could take you comprehensively on the vast journey that is Carnatic music, is less than desirable.

What can you, or the community, do to awaken the latent talent in the district?

The Young Badaga Association has just come up with music classes. Nama Sankirthanana is, again, an important part of this endeavour. I feel that the expert presence of musicians can enhance the knowledge of those who are a part of it and introduce them to various classical musical instruments like the harmonium or the mridangam. I am glad to say that they have asked me to be a part of it, and it is something that I am really looking forward to.

The music from the Hattis. How close is it to Carnatic music?

The Nama Sankirtanas and Bhajans here have their own roots and are connected to Carnatic music at a very basic level. The music that echoes in the region has a touch of many Carnatic ragas, which includes Vakulabharanam, Sindhunhairavi, and Natabhairavi. Popular instruments such as Hara Kolu (similar to Shehnai) and Madhalam are used by the Kasavas for many of the festivals celebrated by the Badagas.

How does Carnatic music influence the mind and overall well-being?

I had to go away from singing for a while until I was employed full-time by my current employers (Government School, Namakkal). But I had to come back to it. Carnatic music is a force that beckons you. It doesn't leave you from its grasp ever. The happiness of singing a Hamsadvani or Kalyaani gives me a sense of ecstasy, knowing that I am capable of rendering it. I feel it is equal to the ecstasy that many

rishis have attained through mindfulness. You simply lose yourself in the process.

What are your favourite musical pieces?

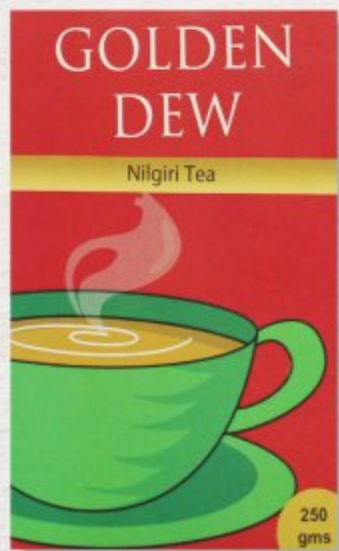
I enjoy Panthuvrali, a Raga enjoyed most by Lord Shiva. I believe that for you to emulate a Raga and bring the best out of it, the Goddess of that Raga, or in literal terms, Raga Devathai, must be pleased with you. I think I have a special connection with the Goddess of Panthuvrali.

Any final message to fellow people in the district?

Music has a special place in the Nilgiris, and this cannot be contested. But this place can become a cultural phenomenon when those with expertise play a role in identifying and nurturing budding artists. I feel there is plenty of potential, but most of it remains untapped. Let's hope this changes in the next decade or so. I hope others will feel as I do and help bring more music to these beautiful hills. ■



*Add a
touch
of gold
to
every
cup*



Golden Dew Tea Factory
49 Ratan Bagh Annexe, Figure of 8
Road, Coonoor, Nilgiris 643101

+91 86674 70926
admin@goldendew.in
goldendew.in





THE WHISTLING HUNTERS

Rohan Mathias has lived in the Nilgiris for over forty years and loves showing people how to responsibly enjoy and care for its natural magnificence. Here he gives us a glimpse into the life of the Asiatic Wild Dog, also known as the Dhole

To the uninitiated, the Asiatic Wild Dog – also known as Dhole – with their deep ruddy-orange coats and furtive but clever movements, may be mistaken for foxes.

These family-oriented animals were dangerously at risk of extinction, thanks to British hunters who placed a bounty on every Dhole carcass brought in by locals. As indiscriminately as they wielded their ideology on the people in their colonies, the British extended their sense of supremacy over the wildlife in these territories too. The reason they persecuted the Dhole is because they held them responsible for the depleting game population, thus depriving them of targets for their own sport. Between 1910 and 1923, 692 Dhole were killed in the Nilgiris (*Guide to Shikar on the Nilgiris, 'Big Bore', 1924*). By 1926, the bounty was decreased from 25 rupees per carcass to 20 rupees because of the volume of carcasses being brought in.

Fortunately, the Dhole have made a comeback in the Nilgiris. This area forms part of the clusters where Dhole are found – the Western Ghats, Central India, North East India and the Himalayan foothills.

Here in our neighbourhood, Dholes operate mostly in large forest patches, tea plantations and the periphery of towns, from the Moyar in the North to Manjur in the South, and from Kotagiri in the East to Pandalur in the West. While their pack sizes normally range between 8 and 12 adults, on rare occasions you could chance upon an exceptionally large pack of between 30 and 40 dogs. I was lucky to encounter a super-pack of 32 Dholes in Mudumalai in 1991.

At a glance they might all look similar, but closer observation will reveal distinct traits, and a complex but clearly defined social structure.

Dhole packs are an intriguing study in systematic codes of behaviour.

While domestic dogs breed all through the year, Dhole have a specific breeding and denning season. Unlike wolves, Dholes can have more than one breeding female in the same pack, who share dens. In these parts, Dhole pups are born around November / December. For the next eight months, the sole focus of the pack is geared to protecting, providing and caring for the pups.

They scope out safe dens to raise pups in, shifting from time to time between a network of dens ranging over kilometres. Dens may include



© Sameer Jain

burrows, tree hollows or even under road culverts and drains of abandoned buildings.

One of the greatest threats to the pack at this time are tigers. The presence of a tiger in the vicinity drastically determines the packs' strategy and movement patterns.

Members of the pack have been observed to lure the tiger away by showing themselves heading in the opposite direction. If the tiger decides to hang around near a den, the pack will carefully relocate to another pre-determined denning site, sometimes seeking refuge closer to human habitats that tigers tend to avoid.

As caring as they are towards their pack, Dholes are also formidable hunters. Their hunting skills are enhanced by the fact that they are amongst the best athletes in the jungle – talented jumpers, strong swimmers and resilient runners.

Hunters in the pack have been observed playing together before they set off, reminiscent of pep rallies to boost energy and morale.

Generally, Dholes make an assortment of sounds, ranging from playful squeals, puppy-like whining to chirps.

What gives them the name 'whistling dogs' is what we sometimes hear as a volley of high pitched whistles designed quite effectively to frighten and confuse their prey as the hunters surround it. Undoubtedly, some of the most strategic hunters, Dholes employ cunning methods to wear down their prey in ways that are energy-efficient and fool-proof. For instance, when hunting a deer stag in the scrub jungle, they will herd it into thickets where their antlers are likely to



impede their speed and avenues for escape. Once the animal is too exhausted or no longer able to dodge, the hunters descend upon it in a violent frenzy of feeding, often-times going through the prey even before it draws its last breath.

Hunters will then return from a kill and regurgitate food for the dogs and pups at the den.

The recent infection of mange seen in the Masinagudi - Bokkapuram pack has highlighted the interrelation of wildlife and domestic animal

populations. One way in which we all can contribute to the survival of these Whistling Hunters in the Nilgiris is to ensure the timely treatment of domestic and stray dogs for illnesses that can potentially spread to their wild counterparts.

Often overlooked in favour of more celebrated and glamorous animals like the Tiger and Elephant, Dholes are a vital cog in the ecosystem of the Nilgiris. And when allowed to be, teachers of great wisdom and intelligence. ■





Walk the Chalk

International, award-winning snooker player Mariam Agnish J talks to Inside43 about her career and what she will be shooting for next

The Nilgiris is home to some extraordinary talent. This district's youth have successfully found their way into different arenas of work, and it is safe to say they stand out anywhere they go.

In how they perform professionally and personally, they have always done the district proud. This is especially so with 24-year-old Mariam Agnish J, who made it to the international snooker hall of fame before she even turned 18.

This is the story of this soft-spoken young girl.

How did it all start?

The game of Snooker itself began in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. It was started by Sir Neville Francis Fitzgerald Chamberlain. But the rules were framed in the Ootacamund Club. Some say the club still features the

first snooker table and the frameset, which should be 100 years old now, I guess. I started my journey in 2013 and have been playing for 11 years. I attended my first state competition in 2014. In 2015, I had an opportunity to represent India in the World Under 18 Snooker Championship. This was my first experience of the international circuit, even though I did not win.

How does one get into the competition circuit in this game?

Every year, it goes in sequence. One has to play in the State competition, get selected, try to make it to the top three among the ranks, and then represent Tamil Nadu in the nationals. After we get selected for the nationals, there is another selection camp to choose those who will represent India in the World Snooker Championship. The top eight are selected. These eight candidates then undergo another selection process thereafter, out of which the top four represent the country in the World Championship.

How many times did you make it to the Nationals?

I have represented India thrice now. 2015 in Russia, 2016 in Belgium, and 2017 in Russia again. I am proud to tell you that I am the first person from the Nilgiris to represent India in the World Snooker Championship. In Belgium I even had friends from Coonoor who came to watch me play. I have received two gold medals, ten



silver medals, and seven bronze medals at the State level. I have won two silver medals and eight bronze medals at the National level.

Did you have any mentors on your road to success?

Nothing would have happened without the support of my father, Joseph Selva Kumar. When I was little, my father used to take me along with him when he played his district matches. The balls and the clicking sounds were fascinating, and the game gradually became a part of me. My father kept motivating me and pushing me ahead. He used to say that winning or losing is secondary and that participation should be the main motive. He always advises me to play my game the best I can, and the outcome will take care of itself. To get more technical, he says you should not play against the opponent, but the table. It was only recently that I started to take coaching from a world-certified coach. He is a Level II world-certified coach, Mr. Suriyanarayanan.

Can you tell us a bit more about your father?

Apart from what I've already said, he is a very good snooker player. He is among the top two in the Nilgiris and has nearly 35 years of experience in this field. He started practising at the age of 16. He has been coaching the members of the Coonoor Club for quite some time now. He also has a camp at Stanes School, Coonoor, where he coaches students twice a

“I am proud to tell you that I am the first person from the Nilgiris to represent India in the World Snooker Championship

week. My dad started a coaching camp sometime in 2013. I was among its many students. A year after joining the camp, I represented Coonoor in the State-ranking tournament.

How do you juggle your studies with your love for snooker?

It's literally been two years since I touched my cue as I am pursuing my MBA in Coimbatore. I would be completing this in a couple of months, and of course, will need to look for a career that pays the bills. However, regardless of circumstance, I don't intend to leave this sport as it is my passion and I'll be back in the game, so to speak, one way or the other.

Is there a growing interest in the sport?

Students who come to the camp tend not to pursue the game beyond that. This is because, when parents watch snooker on the television, they see people smoking and drinking during the play which tends to give the wrong impression. What they don't realise is that while snooker is actually a distinguished sport. I'd say it offers far more opportunities for girls than boys and I would be very glad to see more girls getting into this game.

What moments in your career really stand out?

I don't remember the year I played, but it was the state-ranking finals in Chennai (an event organised by the Tamil Nadu Billiards and Snooker Association). That was a billiards game, though. My opponent was a good player and five points ahead of me. The audience was expecting her to win. I had to finish the game within



two minutes. So, I got up, took a quick break, and made it to 36 points in the last two minutes. My opponent ended up with 35 points. I got widespread appreciation for that as it was beyond everyone's expectations. Honestly, even I didn't think I could pull it off at that nth hour.

What is the difference between billiards and snooker?

Billiards was invented in the 13th century. It is a three-ball game (two strikers, one common red ball). You have the option to play with three or four kinds of shots. Snooker has 22 balls (15 reds, 6 colour balls, and one striker), but you have to manage with one kind of shot. You pot one ball and follow the other ball. The only similarity is that both the games are played on the same table.

Any women in billiards or snooker who inspire you?

In the right-handed category, I admire Vidhya Pillai from Karnataka. I like her posture and the way she plays. In the left-handed category, I am a fan of Madhya Pradesh-based Ami Kamani.

What competitions would you like to represent in the future?

There is a Snooker Tour, a premier competition in snooker realms. If you get to play in that, they give you a card. When you get the card and enter into that position, you needn't participate in the State, Nationals, or Internationals. You have made it in snooker.

What would be your advice to parents?

I would advise parents to encourage their children to take up any sport of interest to help them grow into well-rounded individuals. I recommend snooker, as it is a game that demands

a lot of your physical and mental abilities. This sport needs more mental fitness than physical fitness. People who are successful here, generally do a lot of homework in terms of breathing exercises or yoga. So, it's an ideal game for all youngsters. It shapes them to be fine people. During my school years, I

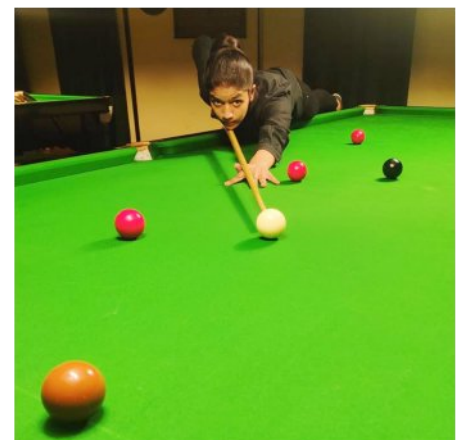


My father kept motivating me and pushing me ahead. He used to say that winning or losing is secondary

represented the district in table tennis. And I played basketball for a year. But after I started playing snooker, I haven't looked elsewhere. I am very proud to be an international snooker player from this district and I attribute this success entirely to my parents. The support of parents is generally understated. I believe, when they are with you in your endeavours, and back your dreams, you can conquer the world.

Anything you'd like to say in closing?

I feel extremely proud to be interviewed for the first full-colour magazine of the Nilgiris. And I'd like to say it again, my parents deserve all the credit for any successes I have had. ■



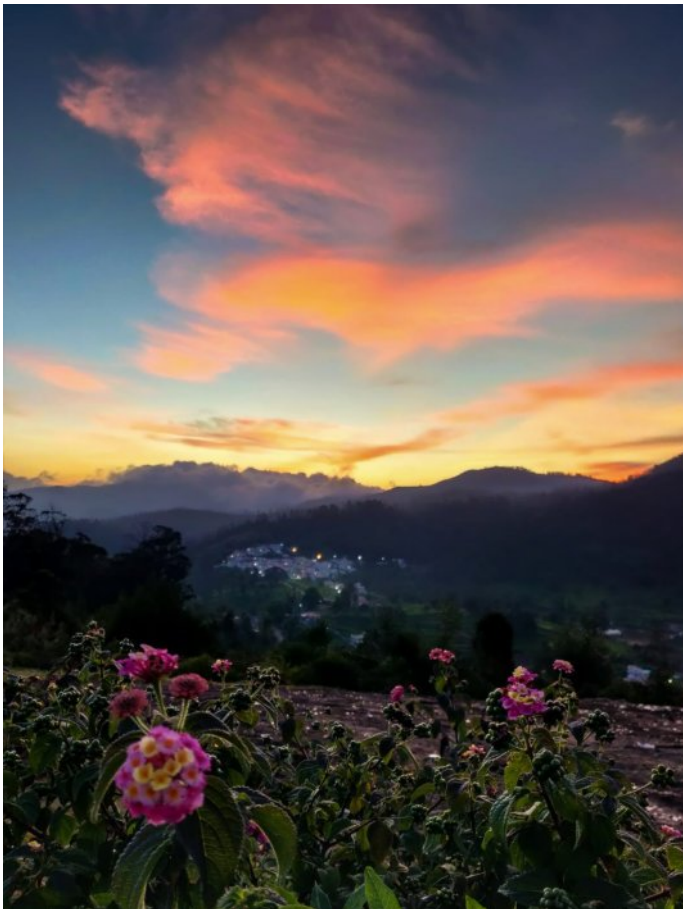
Sunrise, Sunset

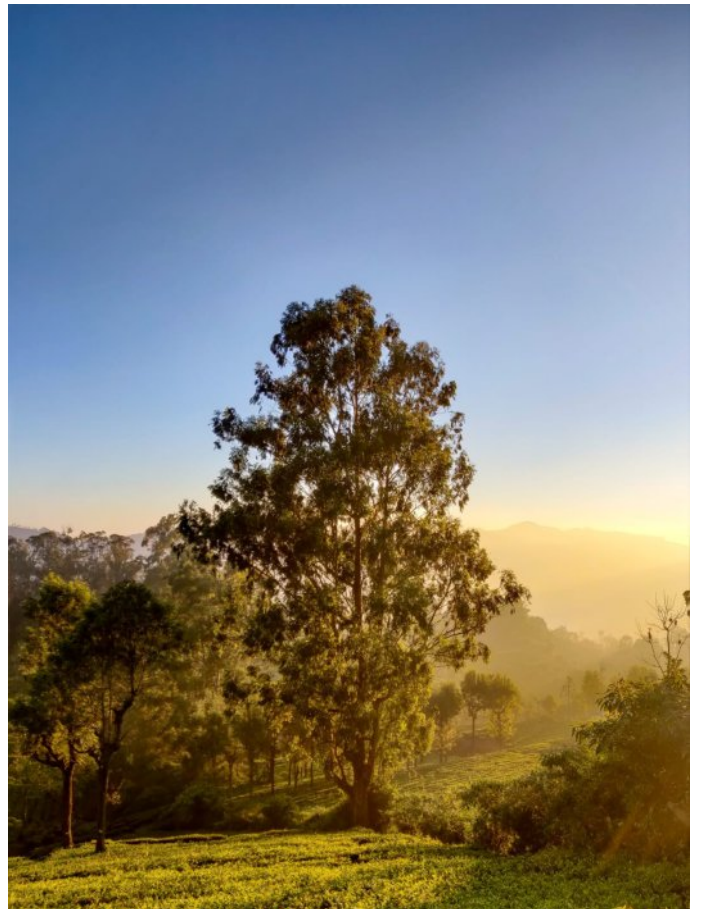
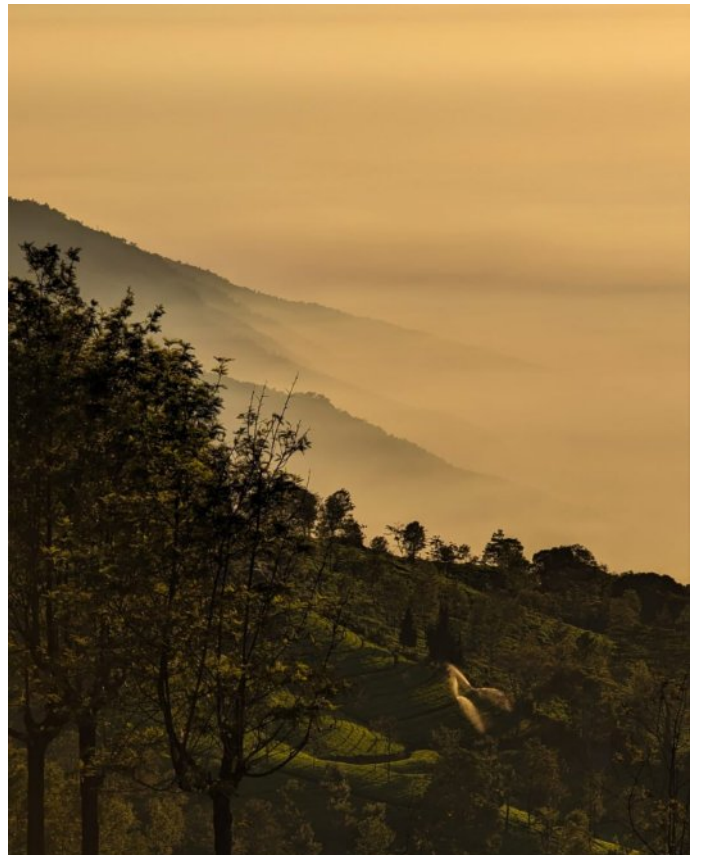
The magnificence of dawn and dusk as only seen in the Nilgiris, captured by Suraj Mehboobani, a Coonoor-based photographer























Wellington Barracks - The First Ceremonial Parade on 15 August 1948



Thambis in action at Maharajke



Thambis of 3 Madras after war at
Sialkot Sector - 1965 War



THE WARRIORS OF WELLINGTON

*A salute to the Madras Regiment, as **Inside43** takes us on a march
through time with the Thambis who live in our midst*

Wellington! Home of the War Memorial, Black Bridge, a stunning little lake and a historically rich cemetery. It is also the seat of the oldest Infantry Regiment of the Indian Army, dating back more than 265 years. It is where our beloved Thambis (soldiers of the regiment) begin their journey and where they end it.

In The Beginning

The Merchant Company of London first set down roots in Madras (present-day Chennai) in the year 1640 and raised its own fort, Fort St George, in 1644. Then in 1690, the Company acquired Fort St David in the town of Cuddalore. When the British East India company was formed in 1708-09, Fort St George and Fort St David were the two major ramparts of the English traders on the Coromandel coast. The French in India wielded their power from the town of Pondicherry, a few miles north of Cuddalore, on the sea-coast.



When war broke out between England and France, the French in India began their preparations for war against the British in India. The French besieged Fort St George, and the English defenders (including Clive) were taken prisoner. The French commander, Dupleix, moved in to lay siege to Fort St David. By this time, the British Governor in council in Fort St David had hurriedly raised sepoy levies for the future security of the Coromandel coast. Thus, when the French force presented itself before Fort St David, there were 3,000 of the newly-raised levies to defend it, and Fort St David survived the attack.

Then in accordance with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, signed on 30th April, 1748, Madras was restored to the British in exchange for Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada.

The British in India learnt a valuable lesson from this encounter, which was to have far-reaching results on the history of the Presidency - that trained, disciplined and well-led Madrasis made a formidable fighting force.

As it always did, war broke out anew between England and France and the French in India were again ready for battle. By then, the government of Madras had realised the seriousness of this recurring threat, and felt the necessity to maintain a dependable standing army that could be deployed as needed. On 4th December 1758, the first two Madras Battalions, numbering 2213 men, were raised by Col Robert Clive. Thus, in 1758, commenced the glorious history of Madras Regiment,



Field Marshal Manekshaw speaks to troops during the 1971 Indo-Pak War

the oldest in the Indian Army, the first to be raised on Indian soil, and the actual ancestors of our Indian Army.

The first battalion raised in 1758 was known as '1st Battalion Coast Sepoys'. The valour and steadfast discipline of the Madras foot-soldier soon came to be recognised, and the strength of the Madras army rocketed skywards. The Madras Infantry reached its maximum strength in 1826, with 52 battalions under its wing.

The Madras Regimental Centre was first raised as the 36 Madras Battalion, at Tanjore, in 1794. It was thereafter re-designated as 2/13 Madras Native Infantry in 1798, 26 Madras Native Infantry in 1824, 86th

“Next time you drive by the gates of the MRC, or watch our Thambis go for a run along these winding roads, shouldering their heavy gear, please give them a salute

Carnatic Infantry in 1903, and 10/3rd Madras Regiment in 1922. It was subsequently placed under suspended animation. It was again resurrected as the Recruits Training Centre of the 3rd Madras Regiment, at Madukkarai, on 19 July, 1942. As a result of the efforts of General Sir Archibald Nye, the Governor of Madras, and second Colonel-in-Chief of the Madras Regiment (10 Aug 1946 to 31 Mar 1949), the Training Centre moved to Wellington, Nilgiris, in February of 1947 and was billeted to its present location, the well-known Wellington Barracks.

The Wellington Barracks itself was constructed way back in 1852-60 and has a chequered history of its own. In

Ace Thambis of 8 Madras Outside
Siramani during the 1971 war



1964, the Barracks were renamed as 'Srinagesh Barracks' in honour of General SM Shrinagesh, the first Indian 'Colonel of the Regiment'.

The primary role of the Madras Regimental Centre is to train every recruit into a well-trained, highly motivated soldier who is competent, well-disciplined, self-reliant, physically tough and mentally robust. Recruits are trained in key areas such as physical fitness, weapon training, firing, language, sports and computer skills. It is here that they learn to fight with grit and determination, and learn to put country above all else. The admirable job done shows in the many contributions made, and accolades earned, over the years...

“The wars of 170 years unmistakably highlighted the martial qualities of the Madras soldier and his dependability in any form of warfare in any theatre of war in India, or abroad

War Services (1758-1945)

During the first 170 years of existence, the Madras Army participated in various battles, sieges and anti-insurrection campaigns. It fought in the French wars, the four Anglo-Mysore wars, 2nd and 3rd Maratha wars, three Burma Wars, Coorg wars, two China wars and two Afghan wars and won 33 Battle Honours.

Two of the battles that are worthy of special note are the battle of Assaye and the Siege of Seringapatam. The Battle of Assaye is the second Anglo-Maratha war that was fought on 23rd September, 1803, in which the participating battalions were highly commended by the Iron Duke, earning them the Assaye

British Troops Entering Baghdad



“The British in India learnt a valuable lesson...that trained, disciplined and well-led Madrasis made a formidable fighting force

elephant insignia, (This insignia, with the beautifully sculpted elephant proudly adorns the crest of the Regiment, and is what one sees when driving past the MRC). After this battle, Major Gen Sir Arthur Wellesley, the Iron Duke put down his admiration for the Regiment on paper. “I cannot write in too strong terms of the conduct of the troops. They advanced in the best order and with the greatest steadiness under a most destructive fire against a body of infantry far superior in number... All agree that the battle was the fiercest that has ever been seen in India. Our troops behaved admirably. Our sepoys astonished me.” The Siege of Seringapatam was the climax of four hard-fought campaigns for which twelve Madras Battalions were awarded the Battle Honour ‘Seringapatam 1700’. The accolades were well-deserved.

The wars of 170 years unmistakably highlighted the martial qualities of the Madras soldier and his dependability in any form of

warfare in any theatre of war in India, or abroad.

During World War I, the regiment was deployed in North-West India, East Africa, Mesopotamia, Kilimanjaro, Baghdad, Aden and Baluchistan, and was awarded with eleven Battle Honours. On 3rd September 1939, when World War II broke out in Europe, India, as a part of Great Britain, was committed to war on the same day. During World War II, 4 Madras distinguished itself against the Japanese in various actions. In Kabaw Valley (the famous ‘Valley of Death’), a platoon of Captain Miller’s Company located at Shark Picquet on Tamu Road, beat back several formidable assaults on post on 22nd March, 1944 and counted one hundred Japanese dead. On Sita Ridge, Captain (Later Lt Gen) RS Noronha held his company defences for sixteen days against repeated attacks, inflicting heavy casualties on the Japanese. For these operations, he was awarded the Military Cross. In Feb 1945, Major RS Noronha was

awarded the Bar to Military Cross for his company’s attack on an island in the river Irrawaddy. The Regiment was awarded five Battle Honours and two Theatre Honours for its services in World War II.

The Indo-Pak operation of 1947-48 deserves mention. The vision of India attaining independence and taking her legitimate place among the free nations of the world had begun to flash in the minds of Indian nationalists, well over a century before 1947. The Madras Regiment soon came in for its own share in the defence of Kashmir. The Regiment was represented by three of its battalions, all of which had already made their mark at home during the Partition Riots and in service overseas. Battle Honours, ‘Tithwal’ and ‘Punch’, were awarded to 1 Madras and 4 Madras, respectively. Many gallantry awards were earned by the Regiment in these operations.

In addition, the Thambis have served with gallantry and dedication in the Indo-Pak conflict 1965, Indo-

Thambis celebrating the victorious moments after capturing the Maharajke Village in the 1971 Indo-Pak War.



Pak conflict 1971, Operation Bluestar and Operation Pawan.

Beyond Battle

The sporting achievements of the Thambis have been significant. From athletics to archery, they have brought home medals from other States at the National level, as well as made India proud in sporting arenas internationally. They have marched at the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi on many occasions, and have been awarded the best marching troop several times. (For those who would like a glimpse of the military pageantry, in which the Madras Regiment often appears, please check out the Indian Army Hell March videos on YouTube.) The Bagpipers of the Regiment are a singularly talented group, and one of the few, and most recognised bands in the country.

The service of the Thambis to the local community in these hills is, in itself, very commendable. From the tragic aircraft crashes this district has witnessed, to flood relief operations, they step in to lend a hand whenever needed and quietly melt away, asking little in return for their timely humanitarian activities.

So next time you drive by the gates of the MRC, or watch our Thambis go for a run along these winding roads, shouldering their heavy gear, please give them a salute. They are heir to a long history of bravery and service that cannot be summed up in mere words. But to them we owe much. Their very presence is a security none of us should take for granted, and they bring to the Nilgiris a richness of life and colour, for which we should all be very grateful. ■

Visit the MRC Museum located at the Wellington Barracks. A multi-language audio-guide offers visitors a guided tour across the galleries that capture their history, stories of valour, achievements and capabilities of the Veer Thambis.



Field Marshal Manekshaw meeting Thambi troops in 1971 War

A Life in Service

He has served the district in many capacities. Inside43 caught up with Leo Joseph of Aruvankadu about his life in the MRC and outside

When did you start working for the MRC?

My father was a tailor and his friend, Khan Bhai, was also a tailor, and had a contract with the MRC to stitch uniforms. I was just 15 when I began working there, back in the 1970s. I began by working as a trainee tailor. My first bit of work was attaching buttons to the uniforms. I found I really liked the work and was keen to learn more.

What sort of training did you receive in tailoring?

After buttons, I learned to attach the stripes on the shirts and jackets of the soldiers, and also began working on sewing the monograms on the uniform caps. I would work from nine in the morning to six in the evening everyday, except Sundays. I got my lunch from the MRC during the work week. In 1988, Khan Bhai left, as his contract ended and I started to work for Rafiq Bhai in Hava Hill. I learned cutting techniques under my father and Rafiq Bhai and I discovered I was very good at this.

When did you start your own business?

An ex-serviceman helped me get a contract of my own and so I set up shop. I purchased ten machines with the help of the ex-serviceman, and soon was stitching the uniforms for the whole Regiment.

This was back in 2000. I worked till 2005, but then they raised the rent and it became hard to sustain the business.

What was the high point of your career?

I was given the contract to tailor all the dress uniforms for the Thambis for the Republic Day Parade in Delhi, in 2000. This was a Central Government undertaking and a matter of great pride for me. The Thambis won first prize at the parade that year and I am glad to have played a part in their success.

Was tailoring your only business?

No, I also ran the first mini-bus service in the Nilgiris, called Apsara Travels. It was all in the same period. I had two buses, one in partnership

with a friend. Eventually the buses broke down and Apsara travels closed down as a result.

What do you consider your other achievements?

From 1995 onwards, I was the head of the Hospital Street village in Aruvankadu. I was responsible for sorting out the problems of the residents of the village, and often helped settle disputes, and represented people at the police station when needed. I have received a 'Friend of the Police' badge for my work, of which I am very proud.

How are you keeping busy in retirement?

I still work to help people in my area and a few other villages. Many people know me and they trust that I will not cheat or hurt anyone, so most of my days goes by in community service.

How long have you been in the Nilgiris?

I was born here. This is my home and I feel most privileged to have been a part of it, and served both in the military and civilian spheres. ■





MINISO COONNOOR

23 D, STANES SCHOOL ROAD, BEDFORD, COONNOOR



STORAGE



AROMATHERPY



TOYS & PLUSHIES



MAKEUP SUPPLIES



BAGS & WALLETS



NAIL PAINTS



DEOS & PERFUME



DIFFUSERS



BOTTLES



MASK SHEETS



SUNGLASSES



AUDIO SUPPLIES

PRODUCTS
STARTING
ONLY
₹60

NEW PRODUCTS EVERY 15 DAYS

We are open 7 days a week

10am to 8pm



Falling in Love

Ishani Dutt Sarkar tells us of how she came to live in the Nilgiris and why it has such a special place in her heart

A decade back, if someone told me that I would own a hill home in a hamlet in the Nilgiris, and follow the elections in Tamil Nadu, I would have laughed.

Cut to: not only am I a proud resident (albeit part-time) of the Nilgiris, I know the names of the last three district Collectors, I am learning a smattering of Tamil (learning that it's all in the intonation and accents), and I even know the nuances of bison behaviour.

A Bengali, born in Calcutta (that's what it was in the 70s), and growing up across metro cities of India, I have called Mumbai my home for more than half of my life. While my husband and I are both hill and forest-loving individuals, never in our wildest thoughts did we imagine that we would actually live in a hill station, let alone own a dream home in one. Now that's the magic of the Nilgiris...

Our first visit to the area was almost a decade ago, when we decided to come down south to a hill station with temperate weather, vis-a-vis the harshness of the northern

ones. We were travelling with my mother who has always loved the beautiful state of Tamil Nadu. We stayed in Ooty which happened to be getting incessant rains during the first two days of our stay. The cottage we were in was an old construction, and hence dark, damp and very cold. On a lark, we looked at the distance to Coonoor and decided to spend the next two days of our vacation there. And boy, that was the best decision of our lives. We drove down to sunny, beautiful and, most importantly, dry Coonoor weather, and spent two days in bliss. My husband after returning from a walk down the Salvation Army lane told me, "You know there are some stunning homes here...", and we both smiled and sighed.

It took us all of another year to realise that we wanted a hill home of our own. What better place than a state where there is no harsh winter or summer (I know that's debatable, given the weather for the last one month!) and one can spend hours discussing whether the grass is greener or the sky bluer. And the best

part of it all... the people of the Nilgiris. We have not met a more harmonious, peace-loving and helpful community anywhere in the world than the one we have encountered here, over the years. From France to Kashmir, we have Nilgiri loyalists. People are warm and welcoming, happy to help you. No one honks on the streets. There is no road rage. Yes, language is a bit of a conversation halter at times but nothing that Google can't sort out, thankfully.

Now we look forward to coming back time and time again, making beautiful memories, that we carry with us, and that sustain us till we can return. To fall in love, all over again, with this beautiful haven called the Nilgiris which has our heart forever. ■





We COMPLETE
Your HOME

Tiles, Bath Fittings, Glass Partitions, Modular Kitchens,
Interior Solutions, Wooden Flooring, Lights & Switches



BRANDS WE DEAL WITH



f jcceramics.cnr ☎ 8526222245 🌐 JCCERAMICS.IN

23D, Convent Road, Near St. Antony's Parish Hall, Coonoor.

SHOP
Now!

In Good Taste

*Take a culinary tour of the Nilgiris with **Deepika Unni** to explore old and established eateries along with new offerings that together delight both visitors and locals*



Shinkows

Summer House Colony, Upper Bazaar, Ooty, Nilgiris

☎ +91 423 244 2811

Shinkows, the iconic Chinese restaurant nestled in the heart of Ooty, is a delightful haven for those seeking a taste of authentic Chinese cuisine with a touch of nostalgia. As a frequent visitor and admirer of this establishment, I can attest to its unwavering charm and consistent quality over the years.

Established in 1954 by a Chinese couple, Shinkows has retained its original essence, untouched by the overpowering influence of Indian spices commonly found in desi-style Chinese restaurants. This commitment to authenticity sets it apart, offering a refreshing departure from the norm.

From the moment you step inside, you're greeted by the familiar sight of red and white checked tablecloths, reminiscent of a bygone era. Chinese lanterns and fans adorn the walls and ceilings, transporting diners to another time and place.

One cannot talk about Shinkows without mentioning its dedicated staff like Sosai Nandan who has served its patrons

for over three decades. Regulars come into the restaurant asking for popular dishes by the number on the menu - 13A or 25 or 32 which tells you that this is one place that is familiar and enduring.

What truly sets Shinkows apart is its commitment to affordability without compromising on quality. The menu boasts a range of traditional Chinese dishes. Whether it's the savoury flavours of their signature dishes or the comforting warmth of a steaming bowl of noodles, every bite is a testament to Shinkows' culinary prowess.

The owner, Liao Pao Chun is fondly known as "China Dorai". This for me, is a testament to the fact that Shinkows is a cherished part of Ooty's cultural heritage. With its old-world charm and delectable cuisine, it continues to captivate locals and tourists alike, earning its place as a beloved institution in the Nilgiris.

If you're ever in Ooty and craving authentic Chinese fare, a visit to Shinkows is an absolute must.



No. 36, Figure Of 8 Rd, Alwarpet, Coonoor

☎ +91 97873 17171

Hopscotch Pub

Ah, the **Hopscotch Pub** in Coonoor! What a delightful blast from the past mixed with a contemporary twist. I had the pleasure of attending the unveiling of their new menu 2.0, and from the moment I stepped in, I was transported to a world of retro vibes and good old-fashioned fun.

The ambiance was electric, with the kind of nostalgic charm that makes you want to grab a drink and settle in for the night. They surprised me with their SpecialiTea series. Imagine tea-based cocktails like the MiniTea Martini, a delightful concoction of peppermint tea-infused vodka that hits all the right spots. Or perhaps the Pomme Chuckle, where apple-spiced tea meets bourbon and a dash of Angostura bitters and other surprising ingredients for a flavour explosion.

I had the pleasure of chatting with the celebrity chef behind the magic, Darius Madon. With a résumé that includes bastions of culinary creativity like Bastian Hospitality and Sodabottleopenerwala, I knew I was in for a treat.

Darius, along with proprietor, Nikhil, has curated a menu that celebrates local flavours and ingredients sourced right from the community. From partnerships with Havukal Tea Estates to Ranchers Produce and Last Forest, each dish tells a story of the Nilgiris' rich culinary heritage.

I couldn't resist trying their steaks, each served with a unique twist. Whether you're a fan of chicken, beef, rib-eye, or even eggplant, there's a steak for everyone. And the sauces! Whiskey pepper cream and Argentinian chimichurri took these steaks to a whole new level. Oh, and let's not forget their signature 'sarnies'. A nod to the British-inspired Nilgiris, these little bites of heaven are made with freshly baked wood-fired bread that adds a delightful crunch to each bite.

Hopscotch Pub is an experience. With weekend DJs, karaoke nights, classic arcade games, and a fun ambiance, where nostalgia meets the present, you'll want to hop, skip, and jump your way to Hopscotch on your next trip to the Nilgiris.



Silvertip Café & Homestay

SH15, Mettupalayam Highway, Aravenu, Kotagiri

☎ +91 99521 44872

Every time I take the Kotagiri Road, to get to and from Coimbatore, I always make a pit stop at my favourite tea house – **Silvertip Café & Homestay**. Located just 5 kilometres before the quaint town of Kotagiri, Silvertip Café has been welcoming travellers for seven years, offering a delightful blend of comfort and tranquillity.

I love the modern aesthetic of the place. The café's exterior, with its full glass windows, not only provides a clear view of the winding road but also offers glimpses of the lush tea plantations that dot the landscape.

Stepping into Silvertip Café is almost like stepping into a pot of freshly brewed tea, the aroma being so delightful. They take great pride in their speciality teas under the brand Silvertip, each sip a testament to the region's rich tea-growing heritage. For tea enthusiasts like me, this is always a delight and I invariably find myself indulging in multiple cups of their exquisite blends.

Their in-house bakery is another highlight I never miss. The brownies and tea cakes are something I indulge in there, and pack to carry with me to my destination. Each bite is a perfect complement to the serene surroundings of this charming place.

Silvertip Café has a wide range of books and magazines for those of us travelling alone. A cup of tea, a brownie and a book – sigh – I would take a trip JUST for this. Additionally, Silvertip Homestay offers four cosy rooms for guests, each designed with comfort and relaxation in mind.

Silvertip Café is more than just a stopover – it's an experience to savour. Whether you're a tea connoisseur, a lover of scenic views, or simply seeking a peaceful retreat, this charming establishment offers it all. I always leave feeling rejuvenated and invigorated to complete the rest of my road trip, with memories of their speciality teas and warm hospitality lingering long after my departure.



KettiKambai, Gundada Post, Kotagiri

☎ +91 98948 37063

Berry Pecker's at Green Nest

As I navigated the winding road leading to **Green Nest** in Kotagiri, I couldn't help but feel a sense of adventure. The last leg of the journey was challenging, but as I arrived, the resort and its restaurant felt like discovering a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Built by Mr Srinivasan, a Kotagiri local, 10 years ago Green Nest – an eco-friendly resort is nestled in the lap of nature. A short 25 km drive from Ooty or a quick 10 minutes from Kotagiri leads you to this stunning location, where nature reveals itself in its finest form, away from the maddening crowd.

Now, let me tell you about my wonderful dining experience at **Berry Pecker's**, the delightful multi-cuisine restaurant located within Green Nest. Berry Pecker's offers a dining experience to touch the heart. The menu boasts a delightful mix of South Indian and North Indian cuisine, with plenty of options for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. What's more, the restaurant takes pride in using locally sourced,

farm-fresh vegetables, ensuring each dish bursts with tempting freshness.

Whether you choose to dine in the cosy indoors ambiance or prefer the al fresco charm of the outdoor options, Berry Pecker's promises a culinary journey that makes the trip worthwhile. From barbecue delights to organic dishes, vegan options, there's something to please every palate.

Yet, what truly stole my heart was the homely feel of the food and service – a spread reminiscent of delicious, comforting home-cooked meals. The mushroom curry, daal, chicken curry, and soft phulkas paired with salad and raita were simply dreamy.

After indulging in the delectable offerings at Berry Pecker's, I can confidently say that it's one of the better dining spots in Kotagiri. So, if you're seeking a multi-cuisine experience in an elegant setting amidst the serene beauty of nature, look no further than Berry Pecker's at Green Nest.



Juice Bar at Cherrie Berry

Highfield Estate, Coonoor

+91 90255 44582

The much-loved **Cherrie Berry** has a superb section that I must talk about; their vibrant **Juice Bar** takes sipping to a whole new level of fun and flavour!

After a crazy summer party in the Nilgiris, we stumbled upon this oasis of refreshment, and boy, were we glad we did! Let's start with their signature concoctions that pack a punch of health and taste. The 'Skin Glow' elixir, a blend of orange, kale, spinach, cucumber, lemon, and carrot, is like a sip of sunshine for your skin. It's a zesty, vitamin-packed burst that had us feeling rejuvenated in no time.

The 'Diabetic Blend' surprised us with its delightful mix of Jamun, amla, bitter gourd, and chia seeds. Who knew managing blood sugar could taste this good?

But wait, it doesn't stop there! The Juice Bar also boasts a range of inventive drinks that make you go "wow" with every sip. The 'Garden Fresh Avocado Juice' was a creamy dream, a blend so smooth it felt like sipping on a cloud.

I must tell you about the lifesaver after a night of partying – the 'Hangover Anti-Dote.' This bold mix of cucumber, jalapenos, lemon, celery stick, and tomatoes is like a superhero swooping in to save the day.

As if that wasn't enough, the Juice Bar offers an array of milkshakes that are downright sinful. From the classic 'Strawberry' to the indulgent 'KitKat' and 'Red Velvet', they've got a flavour for every craving.

And oh, the mocktails! Sparkling 'Rosemary Vanilla White Sangria', 'Teen Gangster', 'Hook-Aha', 'Melony Basilini' – each name more intriguing than the last. You'll have to visit and try them all to uncover the mystery of these tantalizing concoctions!

So, do yourself a favour and beat the heat at the Juice Bar at Cherrie Berry. Your taste buds will thank you, and you'll leave feeling refreshed, revitalised, and ready for your next adventure! Cheers to juicy fun in the hills!



**EXPLORE
COONOR
LIKE NEVER BEFORE !**



MONKEY TRAILS

UNIQUE EXPERIENCES & DAY TRIPS

Strawberry Picking | Hidden Gems of Coonoor | Jeep Safari | Tea Trails & Tasting



**MORE INFO :
95853-16161**



**ADDRESS :
Near Hopscotch, Figure of 8 Road ,
Bedford , Coonoor**



www.monkeytrails.in

SHIELF LIFE

*From shoes to shawls, from flowers to fashion, from accessories to art, **Inside43** explores what's available in stores across the Nilgiris*



Habba Kadal

A range of ethically-sourced serving spoons that will add a touch of elegance to any dining experience. All come as one-off sets

Price on request

38, Coonoor-Kattabettu-Kotagiri Road, Yedapalli, Yedapalli Hatti, Nilgiris 643103

☎ +91 76038 21537 🌐 www.habbakadal.in

Habba Kadal

A responsibly-sourced collection of handcrafted beaded purses that will enhance the splendour of your wardrobe

Price on request

38, Coonoor-Kattabettu-Kotagiri Road, Yedapalli, Yedapalli Hatti, Nilgiris 643103

☎ +91 76038 21537 🌐 www.habbakadal.in



Metaderma Wellness

Simply Aloe – Aloe Vera based skin & hair care products with over 95% ingredients from natural and organic sources. **Paraben & Sulphate free**. Mild formulations suitable for your daily skin & hair nourishment.

Range starting from ₹190.

Order online from www.simplyaloe.in

☎ +91 422 435 0085 ☎ +91 98431 40130 ✉ mehul@metadermawellness.com



Kriyaan at Tulsi Mall

Your one-stop-shop for a carefully curated collection of jewellery and gifts in gold and silver

Price on request



31, Mount Pleasant Rd, Balaclava, Coonoor, Tamil Nadu 643101

Nilga Proof

Full and sleeveless jackets for men and women, trekking jackets, hats, gloves and all protective clothing for South Indian Plantations.

Various prices

Tea Warehouse Building, 173/3 Gate 3, Brooklands Road, Coonoor 643101

☎ 0423-2230283 ☎ +91 94879 67314 ☎ +91 93845 77224 ✉ sales@nilga.co.in



Cherrie Berry

Delicious farm-fresh avocado varieties offering numerous health benefits.

₹200 per kg onwards

141 Highfield Estate, Coonoor, Nilgiris 643101

☎ +91 90255 44582 ✉ info@cherri berry.com 🌐 cherri berry.com



Golden Dew

Savour the art of tea craftsmanship with Golden Dew Tea's diverse range, delivering a signature taste of the Nilgiris in every cupful.

₹90 for 250gms



49 Rathan Bagh Annexe, Figure of 8 Road, Coonoor, Nilgiris 643101

☎ +91 94875 43406 ✉ admin@goldendew.in 🌐 goldendew.in

Gaia

Beautiful decorative ceramic figurines and pots that add a touch of elegance and artistic charm to your home.

₹5,000 (as shown)



5/78, Union Church Rd, near Modern Stores, Bedford, Coonoor, Nilgiris 643101

☎ +91 93216 46624 🌐 gaiapottery.net

Akshaya Tea Industries

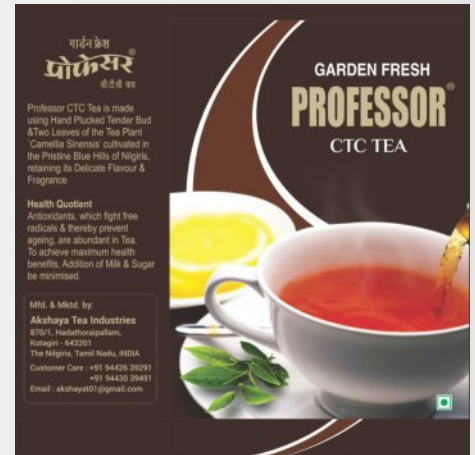
Garden Fresh Professor is pure, high-grown, CTC, Nilgiri tea sourced only from small holdings around the district. Buy some to help keep alive a small tea garden.

₹400 per kg

Factory: 870/1 Hadathoraipallam, Naduhatti Village, Kotagiri 643201

Coonoor Office: 89 Gray's Hill, Coonoor 643101

☎ +91 94426 39291 ☎ +91 86109 08689 ✉ akshayat01@gmail.com



Teknocraft

A range of fun action figures, games and decorative lighting to add some flair to your home, or to give as a gift.

₹2,500 (as shown)



77B Figure of 8 Road, Bedford, Coonoor, Nilgiris 643101

☎ +91 94886 80306 ✉ teknocraft.cnr@gmail.com 🌐 teknocraft.store

Koohoos

The perfect wooden salad bowl to make summer eating an absolute delight.

₹990 (as shown)



Himadri House, 20/21 Church Hill Road (opp. Moddy's), Bedford, Coonoor, 643101

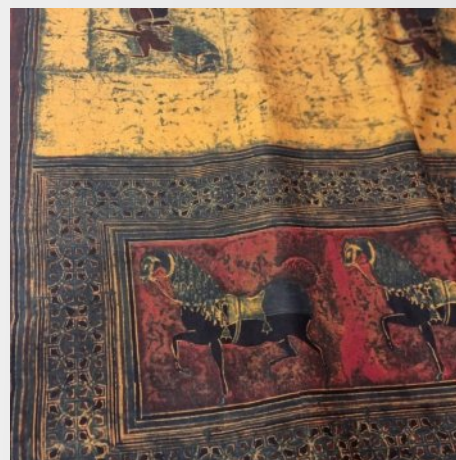
Variety Hall

Take your pick of a unique collection of designer sarees that use fine silk, real flowers and leaves, and vegetable dyes to create a striking impression.

From ₹11,000

Main Bazaar, Ooty, Nilgiris 643001

☎ +91 94425 42649



Teens World

Anarkali printed cotton suits adorned with delicate organza lace, perfect for the summer season. Crafted with lightweight and breathable cotton fabric, these suits offer both style and comfort to elevate your summer wardrobe.

Sizes from M to XXL ₹3,999

Upper Coonoor: 34, Grays Hill, Sims Park Road, Bedford, Coonoor 643101

Lower Coonoor: 16/29 Municipal Market, Coonoor 643102

☎ +91 98658 80202

JC Ceramics

Individual ceramic sinks that turn your bathrooms into art spaces.

₹10,990 (as shown)



23D, Convent Road, Near St. Antony's Parish Hall, Coonoor, 643102

☎ +91 8526 222245 🌐 jcceramics.in

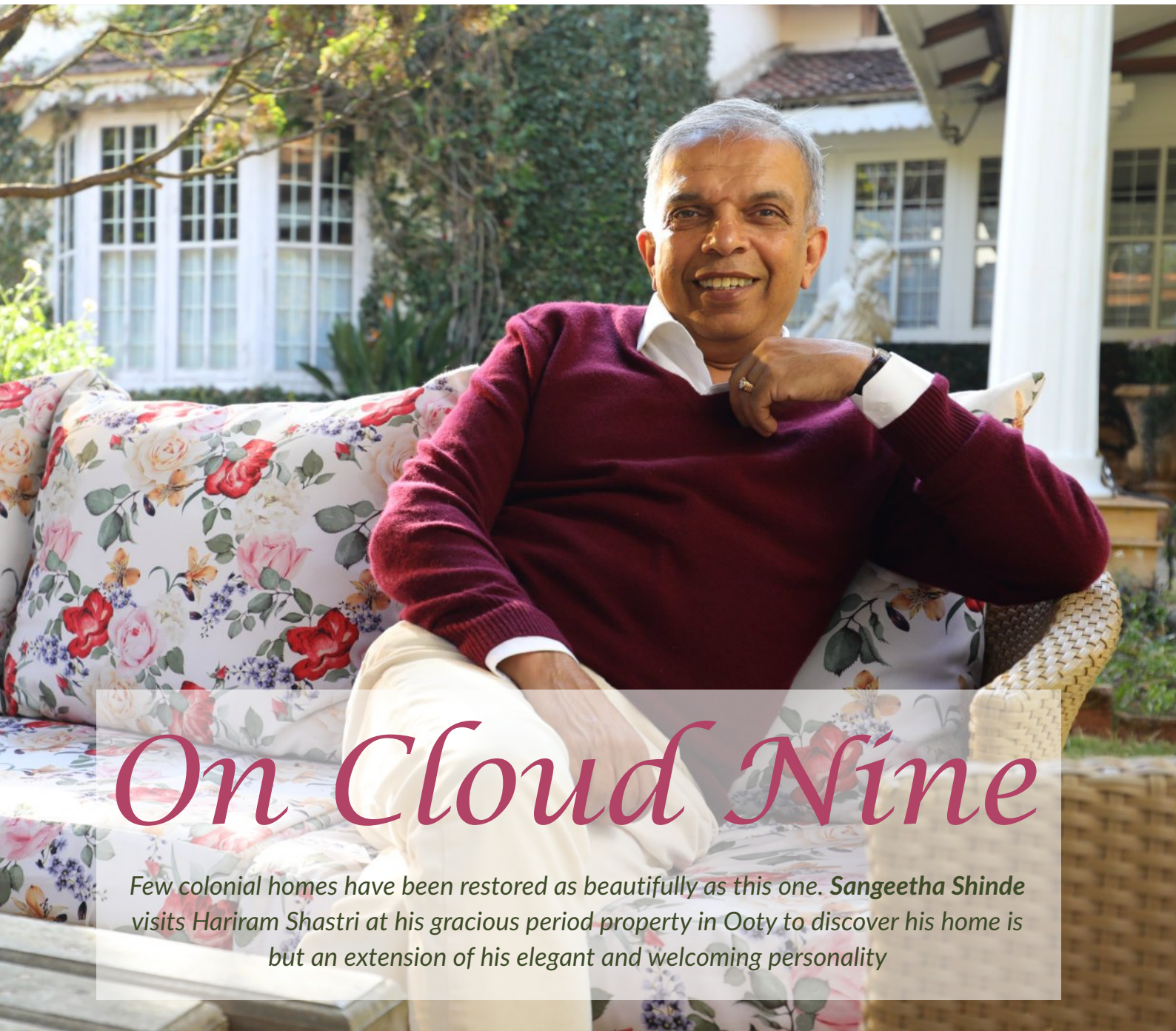
Variety is the spice of life



Scan QR code
for location

VARIETY HALL OOTY offers a finely curated collection of Kanjeevaram sarees, Benarasi sarees, ikats, gadwals, georgettes, crepes, and tussar block-print sarees. We also offer a special series of sarees made from vegetable colours extracted from roots, plants and barks. Our eco-print sarees are designed using natural leaves, flowers and roots. In addition, we have an exclusive range of shawls and stoles, hand block-printed bed linen and branded woollens for men and women.

VARIETY HALL OOTY, Main Bazaar, Ooty 643001 ☎ +91 94425 42649



On Cloud Nine

Few colonial homes have been restored as beautifully as this one. Sangeetha Shinde visits Hariram Shastri at his gracious period property in Ooty to discover his home is but an extension of his elegant and welcoming personality



Hariram's house, despite its size and grandeur, is all a home should be. It makes one feel utterly welcome, and very much ease

The driveway has a discreet sign that says 'Cloud Nine' as you walk up its leafy embrace. As you enter the wrought iron gates you see a meticulously cropped lawn, with a variety of flowers and shrubbery to the right and a red-roofed home of generous proportions, that seems to glow as the afternoon sun reflects off

the bank of windows that line the facade. It has a welcoming air, a quiet beauty and a sense of timelessness, almost as if you have walked through a time portal and gone back a century or two.

And then it gets even better. Hariram Shastri emerges from his home with his usual welcoming smile

which makes you instantly relax. "Where shall we sit?" he asks, and we choose his pretty gazebo that offers shade amidst the sylvan surroundings of his bower-like garden. We sink back into the cushioned comfort of his luxurious garden sofas and Hariram instantly puts me at ease, asking about my life and what I have been doing with myself. This takes a while as he is genuinely interested in the lives of others, and as he interviews me, it seems, his partner Salma emerges, wearing one of her own creations, a lovely ensemble made from fabric she designed herself. She tells us she has ordered tea to be brought out, and as if by magic, it arrives almost simultaneously. The fine bone china cups hold the heat of the tea, reflecting the warmth of the couple who live in this beautiful home. And between sips we ask him about how he came to live here, and what keeps bringing him back amidst his hectic travel schedule.

A Second Choice

Hariram finished his schooling at Lawrence School, Lovedale, finished university in Chennai, and then started his own business in Baroda. As his business grew he was faced with the choice of either moving to the US, or Delhi and Bombay if he wanted to stay on in India. Or possibly even Dubai. But India was where he wanted to be, so he moved to Delhi, but through it all, the hills and mountains always called to him. While in Delhi, he visited Shimla and found a beautiful home there, but after finalising several details, discovered that the law at the time prevented him from buying property there. A while later, a 25th class

reunion brought him back to the Nilgiris, and he thought, "Why not a home here?" He flew down from Delhi for just 24 hours (no mean feat back in the day) to see some properties that had been shortlisted for him. The first was a real pass. With his usual dry humour, Hariram describes his encounter with the agent who said a 'big shot' was selling his home. "I'll first see the house, and then if I like it, I'll see the big shot," he responded. He went to see the house and the agent arranged for a meeting with the seller. "We drove and we drove to the back of beyond, I had no idea where we were going," says Hariram, with a laugh. That house deal however did not go through, as a few hours later the seller's wife changed her mind about selling the property. Luckily, his lawyer knew of another place, not far from his office, and just before racing off to the airport to catch his flight, Hariram went and took a look at this home. "I didn't even go in. It was dilapidated, and there were plants growing out of the floor in some rooms, out of the roof, with the mildew of years on the walls. There was a half tin roof and vinyl covering on the floor. It had been run as a school, Loyola School, and I fell in love with the location. I asked my lawyer to finalise the sale, I wrote out a cheque and that was it."

The Re-creation

Hariram initially tried to get the house restored locally, flying down every week, from Delhi, to supervise and direct the renovations. However, there always seemed to be issues with the contractor and his team, so after a couple of months, he stopped working with them. At this point, the late Jutta Oberoi and a close friend of

his, Reena Singh, of the Kapurtala family, took over the project. They spent ten days here, and then brought in their teams from across the country, be it masons or carpenters or tilers... They had 90 people working, in rotation, on the renovation and they booked all the rooms in the lodges opposite the Ooty Club. "I had those lodges booked for three whole years," says Hariram, with his customary infectious laugh. Jutta Oberoi also took over the planning of the garden, which today is an oasis in busy Ooty. Original trees have been preserved, a lovely bar sits to one side, and a profusion of flowers fill the beds, drawing insects and birds. It has the sense of an old English country garden while retaining a local hillside ambience. When they finished the project, Hariram, Jutta and Reena broke open bottles of champagne, with canapés and cheese, as a celebratory lunch.

"I miss Jutta dearly," says Hariram with feeling. "I spent the last year of her life with her, and her presence is very much in this home. As is Reena



Singh's. They not only gave me ideas, and consulted with me, at every step, about my personal tastes, but as you can see they have implemented things most beautifully."

Living Space

And that's how Cloud Nine, named by Hariram, came to be, and since then he has been adding to it, in different ways. He has acquired other parcels of land which adjoin the property, to consolidate the former grounds, bringing it back to what it had been earlier. The previous owner had sold off various bits at different stages. An old tin shed adjoining the house is now a beautiful sunny conservatory, filled with potted plants, and comfortable sofas, making it a wonderful sunny space in which to while away the hours and take in the views of the beautiful garden. It was designed and executed by Skydomes in Bombay, who were brought in to build it. Building is currently underway to create a 3,000 square foot conservatory, complete with a fireplace, seating, and even a pantry

to make for ease of entertaining, "It's where Sal can have her 100,000 plants," says Hariram, smiling. "Of course, there will be a bar. That will probably come up even before the roof does."

Cloud Nine is the most generously sized house. It has nine bedrooms, some of which have their own living rooms, six of which have been given over to a prestigious hotel chain to run as a luxury boutique property, with about five and half thousand square feet being retained for private use. Will the new conservatory be part of the hotel? "No," says Hariram. "The current conservatory isn't that big and is only used for my very close friends, and hence the bigger one will allow me a more informal space to entertain on a slightly larger scale. I have not really added to the house, I've only restored it, and that is a continuing work in progress."

Before Hariram

Hariram knows something of the history of the lovely bungalow he lives in. It belonged to a gentleman named

Oxton who built it in 1896. There have been four owners that can be traced through the documents available, with Hariram being the fifth. Three of the owners were British as the house was part of the Secretariat, with Raj Bhavan just below. The house originally stood on five acres, but when Hariram bought the place it had come down to two acres. He has been slowly trying to reabsorb what he can of the original lands. This has been a challenge, as the Revenue Survey numbers of land are easier to break down than piece back together, legally.

Sitting in his lush garden, with birdsong filling the air, and the tinkling of the wind chimes in the background, it is easy to imagine one has stepped back in time, but hard to imagine this lovely, sprawling bungalow was anything other than pristine during the years it has stood.

Art House

Those who know Hariram know of his passion for art. Over the years he has built up a noteworthy collection of





creative works that adorn his home. From MF Hussien to Anjolie Ila Menon, to Italian sculptures, walking through his home is a veritable feast for the eyes. "I acquire art that I like. Each one is special to me, and has resonated with me. I have supported well-known names, as well as lesser known artists. I bought a painting of a friend's son who was just starting out, just to encourage him, for example," says Hariram. This is typical of Hariram who is quick to help in any way that he can. The pieces on his walls are an extension of his

personality in some ways. They stand out without dominating, they make you want to linger a while, and they leave you with a broader vision of life in all its diversity.

Hariram's house, despite its size and grandeur, is all a home should be. It makes one feel utterly welcome, and very much at ease. Its understated luxury has a remarkably down-to-earth feel about it, and this is because of the owner himself who has the special knack of making anyone comfortable. The house is, like Hariram, a unique expression of

taste and refinement, and it is, indeed, well named, for being in there even for a few moments, high up on the hills of Ooty, you do feel as if you are on Cloud Nine. ■



Lake Life

We all know and love the Ooty Lake. Klouse Bhattacharya takes us on a tour of our best known water-body, its history and the challenges it has encountered over time

Anyone who grew up in the Nilgiris will remember the Ooty Lake well. Each and every corner of its gently winding shoreline fragrancd by the smell of eucalyptus, with water lilies spreading their blooms over its tranquil surfaces and the call of birds as you lay on a boat drifting peacefully along what felt like a slice of heaven's bounty on earth. But that was a different time. Today, tourists throng to it over summer, and the incessant hum of traffic pervades its once-peaceful setting, over which nary a bird can be heard.

It is still a beautiful lake. An emerald feather in Ooty's cap, so to speak. But like the man-made traffic that swirls around it today, the lake too was a

feature of human intervention and is an artificial one, constructed by John Sullivan in 1824. It was created by damming the water flowing down the mountain streams in the Ooty valley, to pool into the area that today beckons visitors from all corners of India and beyond. In addition to the boating facilities, children's park and Government run cafe, there are now plans to begin zip-lining activities across the lake.

Plant Life

Interestingly, the lake has had its fair share of mishaps over time. It became empty on three occasions when it breached its bund. Originally intended for fishing, ferries travelled across the lake, but over time, it

gradually shrank in size, making way for the current bus stand, race course and lake park, which stand today. In its heyday however, it was an impressive stretch of water.

The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation took possession of the lake in 1973 and transformed it into a tourist attraction by providing boating facilities that offered visitors unparalleled views of forested shorelines through which one could spy glimpses of life in town. This beautiful water body has not been without its threats and setbacks though. The lake has repeatedly been plagued with rapidly proliferating weeds, specifically water hyacinth, causing continuous



problems for the officials of the Public Works Department. Continued efforts to keep the lake free of these ubiquitous plants have been successful for the most part, but as an ongoing effort, it is not an easy one. Most measures to remove the hyacinth have been either through chemical treatments or manual removal, but they have proven to be ineffective and expensive. The Municipal Corporation in Ooty has spent millions to clean the lake, but the hyacinth keeps coming back almost immediately. The serious ecological and economic problems caused by the invasive species of water hyacinth and water moss in the Ooty Lake still have the potential to

choke the life out of the lake, and keeping them in check is key to preserving the lake.

Bird Life

In 2023, the lake hosted the highest number of wetland birds (602) in the district. Unfortunately, this year, the numbers have plummeted (270), causing concerns among conservationists about the lake's continued viability as a key habitat for wetland bird species. Wetland birds play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance of our planet. They help control pests, pollinate plants, and even disperse seeds. Without them the consequences could be terrible. But what exactly is causing this decline in numbers? There are

several factors, one of them being pollution.

The lake is surrounded by human settlements, and the waste generated eventually finds its way into the lake. This pollution not only harms the birds but also affects the quality of water. Habitat loss plays its part, of course. Wetland birds require specific types of habitats to thrive, and as human activity strays into their world, the birds lose their homes. Conservationists are working hard alongside the government to address these issues and save the Ooty Lake as a key habitat for wetland bird species, and are calling for stricter regulations on pollution and habitat protection measures.

Environmentalists have urged the district administration to clean up Ooty Lake, after analysis of samples collected from the water body confirmed the presence of *Clostridium* bacteria in the water, and also high alkalinity in parts of the lake. Microbial testing of the lake was undertaken for harmful bacteria that could potentially threaten endemic and migratory bird species that visit the lake every year.

The presence of more than one type of DNA during testing indicates the possibility of multiple species of *Clostridia* in the water sample. *Clostridia* can be harmful to the biodiversity of the lake. With the Government's lack of assessment and implementation of water treatment, this poses a significant risk to both humans and wildlife. A pH assessment of the lake's water showed that water along the drainage canal flowing into the lake was alkaline, while water along a part of the lake near the Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) was also highly alkaline. The water sample, which turned out to have the presence of a strain of *Clostridium* bacteria, was also from this part of the lake, where lot of local, as well as migratory birds, use as a

foraging ground. Certain species of *Clostridium* bacteria can negatively affect the hatching rates of birds, while the high alkalinity of the water will also render the lake uninhabitable for amphibians and reptiles.

A study by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board discovered that the Ooty Lake was the most polluted water body in the state of Tamil Nadu, and unsuitable for drinking. This is a serious issue as the lake is a vital resource for the community, and its pollution could have long-lasting effects on the environment and people's health. This is not merely an ecological problem, but impacts the economy and well-being of the town of Ooty. The lake is a major tourist attraction and source of revenue, and the presence of these invasive species makes it unattractive for visitors. It is therefore important to find a solution to this problem before it gets worse. One possible solution that has been suggested is to introduce natural predators that feed on these invasive species. However, this could potentially create another problem as non-native elements are introduced into a carefully-balanced ecosystem. Another solution might be using biodegradable materials to

create barriers around the lake that prevent these species from spreading out as they do now.

Human Life

We need to take this issue seriously and find a sustainable solution that doesn't harm the environment or the economics of the town. During the summer season in May, the lake, as we all know, comes alive with boating pageantry for two whole days, and people from all over come to watch the races. That, of course, means more waste is generated, there is increased air and traffic pollution, which creates another set of problems.

However, ultimately the answer to the issues facing this beautiful, historic lake lies in the hands of man. And by this, we cannot just leave it to Governmental bodies who are doing a lot to maintain the ecosystem of the lake and its surroundings. It is important that we, as humans, as citizens or visitors to the district, take action at the micro level and do our part in keeping our water bodies clean. We can start by reducing our use of plastic and properly disposing of waste. We can also support organisations that are working towards cleaning up our lakes and rivers.

We can reduce our carbon footprint, properly dispose of waste, and support conservation efforts financially or through volunteer work.

Small actions, done collectively, can have huge results, and for the love of the Nilgiris, and our iconic lake, we need to do our part to protect our planet's biodiversity and ensure that future generations derive the same pleasure from it that we are privileged to. ■





Koohoos is a one-of-a-kind destination concept store in Coonoor, with a unique curation of stylish decor, gifts and souvenirs for contemporary homes.

Find us at: **Koohoos, Himadri House,
20/21 Church Hill Road (opp. Moddy's),
Bedford, Coonoor Nilgiris 643101**

A Horse With No Name

The plight of race horses requires attention worldwide. Shobana Chandrashekhar tells us the steps taken in our district to reduce their suffering and create a better environment for all living creatures



Turn to the horse race section of the sports page, and you will see that racehorses are given unique and imaginative names. Their names are often crafted from superstition, parentage, the owner's other interests, or a combination of the above. Gold Spark and Classic Step were the names of the horses on which I first learned to ride. The

boarding school that my brother and I attended offered riding lessons, and since the headmaster at the time was passionate about riding, lessons were taken very seriously. My brother was drawn to horses like a duck to water, and everyone knew to look for him in the stables after classes. My Dad, who is drawn to anything that makes adrenaline course through his veins

had grown up riding donkeys and buffaloes with his friends in Aruvankadu while imagining that they were mighty steeds. Therefore, in order to make his childhood dream come true, and to encourage my brother's passion, he decided that it was time for us to buy a couple of horses.

The Ooty Race Course is famous for being the only high altitude course

in the country, and has drawn enthusiasts for almost two centuries. What better place to look for a horse? So, after several visits to the course and many long conversations with horse owners and the vet, we eventually came home with Gold Spark, a gorgeous thoroughbred that had just retired from the track, and with Ahmed. Ahmed was a 'Syce' - a horse groom - who had worked with horses all his life, and had also recently retired. He was wonderful with the horses, retraining them and teaching us how to handle them.

Over the next few years, during our school vacations, we were completely consumed by the horses. We rode in the morning, then watched and assisted as they were 'malished' or rubbed down. Their bedding had to be changed, their feed prepared meticulously, and the farrier brought in to trim their hooves and shoe them every other month. Their saddles and bridles had to be cleaned and oiled, and the horses had to be ridden every day, whatever the weather. They had been bred to race, and so would start to gallop if they ever passed the occasional vehicle, perhaps mistaking it for another horse on the track. When we returned home after a trail ride, they would always gallop the last stretch home, racing to the finish line, however hard I tried to rein them in. Thinking back, it's a wonder that we survived without a broken neck!

Buying the horses was the easiest part. It was a tremendous amount of responsibility for my Dad, even with Ahmed doing all the heavy lifting. I could see that owning a riding horse was much like owning a luxury car, only much more expensive and a lot more work - enough to make me

decide that when I grew up, I definitely didn't want to own one!

One Horse

Many moons later, having moved back to Ooty after some years away from the Nilgiris, I was driving my daughter back from school one afternoon, when I came across a commotion on the road. A couple of people were trying to help a horse that was lying down and writhing in pain. I stopped to help, and with a great deal of effort, we managed to coax it to its feet and moved it to the side, where it collapsed again. Several frantic calls were made, and the vet I spoke to said that since it had an extremely distended stomach, it was



The horse is now utterly dependent on someone who is ill-equipped to handle the care of an equine

most likely a case of colic, and there was not much that could be done. The horse was dead within the hour.

I soon learned that this scenario was nothing unusual. Almost all the horses wandering around Ooty, in different states of neglect, were thoroughbreds whose racing careers were over. Most people who were sold or given a horse had no business taking possession of them, and used them for tourist joy rides until they were completely broken down. The ones that were fresh off the course were easy to identify. They still looked healthy, with shiny coats, well-defined muscles and groomed manes, but it

was heart rending to see them standing dazed in the middle of a busy road while vehicles zipped past them on either side, honking loudly. A racehorse lives an extremely sheltered life, and is very skittish and accident prone, so being left out to fend for itself is a virtual death sentence. Those that had been 'rehomed' or 'left out to pasture' for longer, had dull shaggy coats and overgrown hooves, their skeletal frames mere shadows of their former selves. Some had injuries that made my stomach turn. Few survived longer than a year, and sadly most were dead less than six months after their last races.

A Racehorse's Story

A racehorse is thought to hit its physical peak at age three, and all the big money races are for two and three-year-olds. While some horses will race for four to five years, it is the rare horse that will race into its double digits. The lifespan of a racehorse, meanwhile, is about 25. Horses, like most domestic animals, are subject to the whims of the humans who have taken charge of their lives. If a horse is exceptional, then he may retire 'to stud'. The same goes for winning mares, who will be bred every year she is able to. However, horses who are not breeding prospects - including all geldings (castrated males) - have very few options after the track.

A lucky few have owners who will make sure that their retirees find homes with an owner who will spend the time and energy to retrain them for a new career, but the majority are sold or given away to people who can barely afford to feed themselves. The owner/trainer just wants the horse



gone, and the buyer's fiscal situation is of no concern. The horses are just a means to an end, and those who cashed in on their labours don't give them a second thought once their income-producing years are over. Many owners sell their losing horse for a song if anyone shows up at the track with some cash. There is no vetting, reference check or trip to the boarding facility where the horse will reside. And, of course, there is no follow-up. In cold climates, horses participating in what is often referred to as the 'Sport of Kings', are covered with warm blankets and given fresh bedding daily. Logic would dictate that those who own horses must also own stables, or rent a place at a public stable, to protect them from wind, rain, and sun. The horse is now utterly dependent on someone ill-equipped to handle the care of an equine.

Horses need 5-7kg of forage per day through grass, hay or a combination of both. They need fresh water throughout the day. Horses put 'out to pasture' have little to eat in said pasture and have no

supplemental feeding. Previously large tracts of land around Ooty that were used as grazing grounds have now turned into housing areas or places of business.

One day, a race horse is being taken care of like royalty, and the next, it is on the streets left to fend for itself. No one comes to feed it. The next day, again nothing. Desperate for food, it finds others of its kind who have congregated to eat from garbage bins, looking for something to eat and consuming plastic and other dangerous items in the process. Horses have very small stomachs and with their anatomy and the microflora of their gastrointestinal tract, eating food that ferments quickly is a sure-fire path to gas build up, and the potential for the stomach to rupture, which is fatal. A horse's large intestine folds upon itself, with several changes of direction and diameter. These flexures can be sites for impactions, where foreign material like plastic can block the intestine, resulting in long-drawn-out suffering before death.

The Starting Point

Over the next few months, I continued to see similar scenes over and over again, and couldn't stop thinking about them. I wanted to do something - anything - and so I called the only two people I knew in town who worked on animal welfare issues. Nigel Otter was a trustee at IPAN, WVS and ran the Hill Area Farm in Masinagudi that was the only place that took in abandoned horses when they could find a sponsor. Nagina Reddy was a fiery and passionate woman who had been the part of the by-then defunct SPCA. Over the next few months, we gathered a few more animal lovers, and revived the SPCA. We made frequent calls on local authorities to make them aware of the dangers to both the horses and motorists.

The employment potential, and the importance of joy rides to the tourism industry made it a complicated and sensitive matter. We organised workshops for tourist riding horse owners. We held several talks with the different horse owner unions who



were all at loggerheads with each other over territorial rights. With the help of the municipality and police, we rounded up all the free roaming horses we could find, and tried to bring in a registration system. We collected the owner's identities and asked for purchase papers so we could identify an owner if a horse was left unattended, and it was announced that the municipality would levy a fine, and the horse would be confiscated from repeat offenders. This had a backlash, since the horse owners started tying the horses to poles by the head or neck, or tying together two feet, so they wouldn't wander. This meant that the horse had even less access to feed or water. When horses were confiscated, it resulted in groups of angry horse owners, who had nothing to lose and everything to gain, having heated arguments with those removing the horses. We filed cases, and waited for hours in the local court while cases were postponed indefinitely. Race horses are usually branded and microchipped, so we

traced a couple of the original owners who feigned ignorance and said, "It's not our fault! We thought we gave them to a good home!" after having given away their horse, one of the most expensive animals to care for, to someone who had to worry about where their next meal would come from. A few had been sold to good homes who had then sold them down the hill.

Small Steps

After much lobbying, we were finally able to get the local administration to bring in an order that completely banned retired race horses from being used for tourist riding. Indian and mixed breed horses could still be used, but race horses would not be allowed to leave the Ooty race course or enter the district from the Mysore race course unless they were going to a stud farm or private riding facility. Following that, over the next few years we have seen a huge reduction in abandoned race horses in Ooty. We do still come across the occasional race horse looking lost or injured, since with the municipality's limited

Ooty also has herds of free-roaming feral ponies that have been fending for themselves for generations without being helped or managed by humans in any way. These ponies are quite hardy, and foals are sometimes taken by tourist riding operators to use for joy rides during the season, or sometimes sold for load bearing to buyers in other towns.

resources, and its lack of a cattle pound, make enforcement an uphill task. However now, most racehorse owners and tourist ride operators now toe the line.

So where do these almost abandoned racehorses now go? Probably to a similar fate elsewhere, or perhaps they are put down, which really is the kindest thing to do. I heard from a source that many years ago, horses were sent to zoos as wild cat feed, but the fact that the horses were pumped full of drugs put an end to that practice. In most other countries, retired horses that cannot be rehomed, go to the slaughter house to be butchered. So do race horses get to retire after only a few years of racing and spend the rest of their years happily grazing?

It would be wonderful if that were true, but It is a sad fact that there are not enough farms and grassy fields to house all the racehorses whose careers are over. All we can do, is our little bit, and hope that humanity will seek to change its ways in how it lives with its fellow beings. ■

To get involved in horse rehoming or to sponsor the care of a horse, contact India Project for Animals and Nature (IPAN) : +91 94436 99376

COME HOME



The Nilgiris is an exceptional place to visit. It combines a rich history, with wide, sweeping vistas of carpets of tea, swirling clouds that soften craggy peaks, and sholas filled with a remarkable variety of flora and fauna.

There are little towns, streams, bustling markets and waterfalls to explore, and when that is done, nothing beats curling up with a good book and a cup of local tea to watch the sunset over the horizon.

Shantiniketan Heritage House offers you the perfect place to relax and take in all the beauty and diversity this unique district offers to the discerning traveller. With all the comforts of home, you can be certain that you will keep coming back for more.

Find us at 5, Barlows Road

Coonoor- 643101

☎ +91 73971 51528 / +91 94864 45651

GARDEN FRESH
PROFESSOR[®]
CTC TEA



A CUPFUL OF CARING

At Akshaya Tea Industries we believe in helping the small tea grower stay in business. Our pure, garden-fresh, high-grown, CTC, Nilgiri tea is sourced only from small holdings around the district. So when you help yourself to a cup of our tea, you also help keep alive a small tea garden. Giving the 'cup that cheers' a whole new meaning.

Akshaya Tea Industries
Factory: 870/1 Hadathoraipallam,
Naduhatti Village, Kotagiri 643201

For trade enquiries contact: Suman Goyal on
+91 94426 39291
+91 86109 08689

Coonoor Office: 89 Gray's Hill Bedford Coonoor 643101

E-mail ID: akshayat01@gmail.com

TEA TIME



A look at the life and philosophy of Sunil Goyal of Akshaya Tea, who tells Inside43 about how he came to the tea industry and what keeps him going

When you meet Sunil Goyal you are immediately charmed. His calm and smiling demeanour will win one over almost instantly. He is a well-known figure in the tea industry in the Nilgiris, and is involved in many a charitable venture in the district, lending his support and guidance wherever he feels there may be a benefit to someone. But unlike many in these hills, Sunil did not begin his

life surrounded by tea and the life that surrounds it. He was born and brought up in Indore, where he finished his schooling at the prestigious Daly College. He went on to do a postgraduate degree in Commerce from the Devi Ahilya University, and simultaneously started working in the world of finance. "I began my career in the world of stocks and finance, as a

member of the Madhya Pradesh Stock Exchange. I always worked under the umbrella of my father, Professor Dhannalal Goyal, while I was living in Indore," he says, remembering the early days of his working life.

The Big Shift

However, Sunil's gentle personality belies a strength of uncommon determination. "The urge to get away

from a family setup and do something individually prompted me to move away from Indore." His first move was to Coimbatore where he tried his luck in the field of tea exports for a couple of years, but the call of the hills nearby proved to be too strong and he eventually decided to shift to Coonoor to start a tea manufacturing unit on the advice of his father-in-law, the late Shri Ishwardass Mittal. "This was the man I consider a mentor and guide to my foray and success in the tea industry," says Sunil.



The Nilgiris actually spoils you beyond redemption and makes you unfit to live anywhere else

When Sunil, and his charming wife, Suman, shifted to Coonoor, they rented a house in Brooklands belonging to Mr Natarajan. His brother owned Akshaya Tea Industries at the time. The unit was offered to them and they bought it outright as it saved them the time and effort of constructing a new factory. As anyone in the hills knows, this is no mean feat.

The thought of altering the name of the factory never occurred to them as 'Akshaya', which means 'indestructible', had a personal resonance for them. They launched their brand of Professor Tea, and this too had a personal significance. "The brand 'Professor' happened for a special reason – my dad had a very

humble beginning as a Professor at the Government Arts and Commerce College and the title of Professor stuck even after he quit his job, and it is how he is addressed, even today. This is my way of giving him a place of honour in my enterprise," states Sunil, in his quiet and unassuming way.

The Small Things

Akshaya Tea, under Sunil's leadership, works primarily with small growers. When asked why, he responds with a simple answer. "We do not own any tea plantations. It is also a simpler proposition to buy the raw material rather than grow it ourselves. There is also a possibility of procuring leaf from bigger growers, but as our experience goes, small growers maintain a higher level of integrity if served well." The philosophy behind their business practice has long reaching results, basing itself on three major factors. They place high importance on the concerns and aspirations of their member growers and try to share their sale proceeds as much as possible with them, creating a virtuous supply chain model that serves everyone's best interests. They treat all their staff and workers as their extended family, rewarding them with adequate compensation for their toil, while factoring in their emotional needs as well. Lastly, they consistently strive for a minimum benchmark in quality to meet the aspirations of customers and are keenly attentive to their feedback and satisfaction. A win-win functioning for all.

The Learning Curve

As a newcomer to this industry, for Sunil, it was a fresh learning in all respects, right from manufacturing technology, procurement of raw

material, maintaining quality, marketing of produce, and above all building trust with the growers and customers alike. In a district which is host to seasoned establishments and families who have had tea as part of their very DNA, this was no mean feat. But Sunil's determination carried him through. His attitude towards the pursuit of new knowledge held him in good stead, as those who know him will testify to. "Learning is a never-ending pursuit and I look forward to enriching myself with knowledge and wisdom in all aspects of my life," he states, with the firm knowledge that he has walked the talk and will continue to do so.

Professionally, he was greatly inspired by his father-in-law, the late Shri Ishwardass Mittal, as well as the late Jeya Tilak Chellam who had a powerful influence on him, both guiding and mentoring him from his first footsteps in the industry



Sunil and Suman Goyal

onwards, until their passing. He speaks eloquently of his late mother, Smt Kusumlata Goyal, as well, whose kindness and caring had a profound influence on his personal development. "Whatever goodness I possess, is because of her unfiltered love and upbringing, and I miss her still. Luckily, my better half, Suman has taken over her role in my life and is a pillar of strength and support for me in every aspect of my life, personal, as well as professional." Those who know Suman will know exactly why Sunil says this.

Tea and The District

Sunil has seen enough of the tea Industry to understand its challenges and the shape of things to come. "This crop has always seen tougher times than any other, I believe, and the same challenges on the price front, which have existed from earlier times, continue to haunt us. A reasonable share of the retail price of tea must percolate down to the producer and the farmer for the healthy sustenance of basic

stakeholders. This is something we are unable to get at the moment and grapple with on a daily basis," he states, echoing the sentiments of a whole industry.

But market issues aside, Sunil is as much in love with the Nilgiris as he is with his wife, Suman. "The Nilgiris actually spoils you beyond redemption and makes you unfit to live anywhere else once you become a part of this place. Everything about this place, its people, its unassuming quaintness, the peace it brings upon you is indescribable and it grabs your very soul in its magical pull," he says with his signature warm smile.

And of course, along with the tough times, come moments of heart-warming satisfaction, since every day offers new experiences and new learning which makes the Nilgiris so special for this entrepreneur.

He recalls one particular incident that stands out in memory. The Tea Board had conducted a stakeholders' meeting at UPASI where all the tea manufacturers, small growers and

other vested stakeholders were participants. "A self-help group of small growers, attached to our factory, cited our unit as a fine example of fairness to small tea growers, and to be emulated by all factories. It filled my heart with such pride, as well as gratitude," says Sunil, the happiness of that moment clearly visible in his voice and face.

Sunil is now a Nilgiris soul, through and through. He is happy to encourage people to join the industry, but warns of the perils of short-term objectives. "If you are over ambitious or want to grow fast, it may not give you much, but will give you enough if you are satisfied with a little less," he sums up, philosophically.

And so Sunil applies this thinking to all he does, be it in tea or his involvement with the Rotary Club, going about the business of tea and life in these hills; adding to its diversity, helping small growers grow while adding to the richness of living in this benign and gentle part of the world. ■



WHATEVER THE OCCASION...



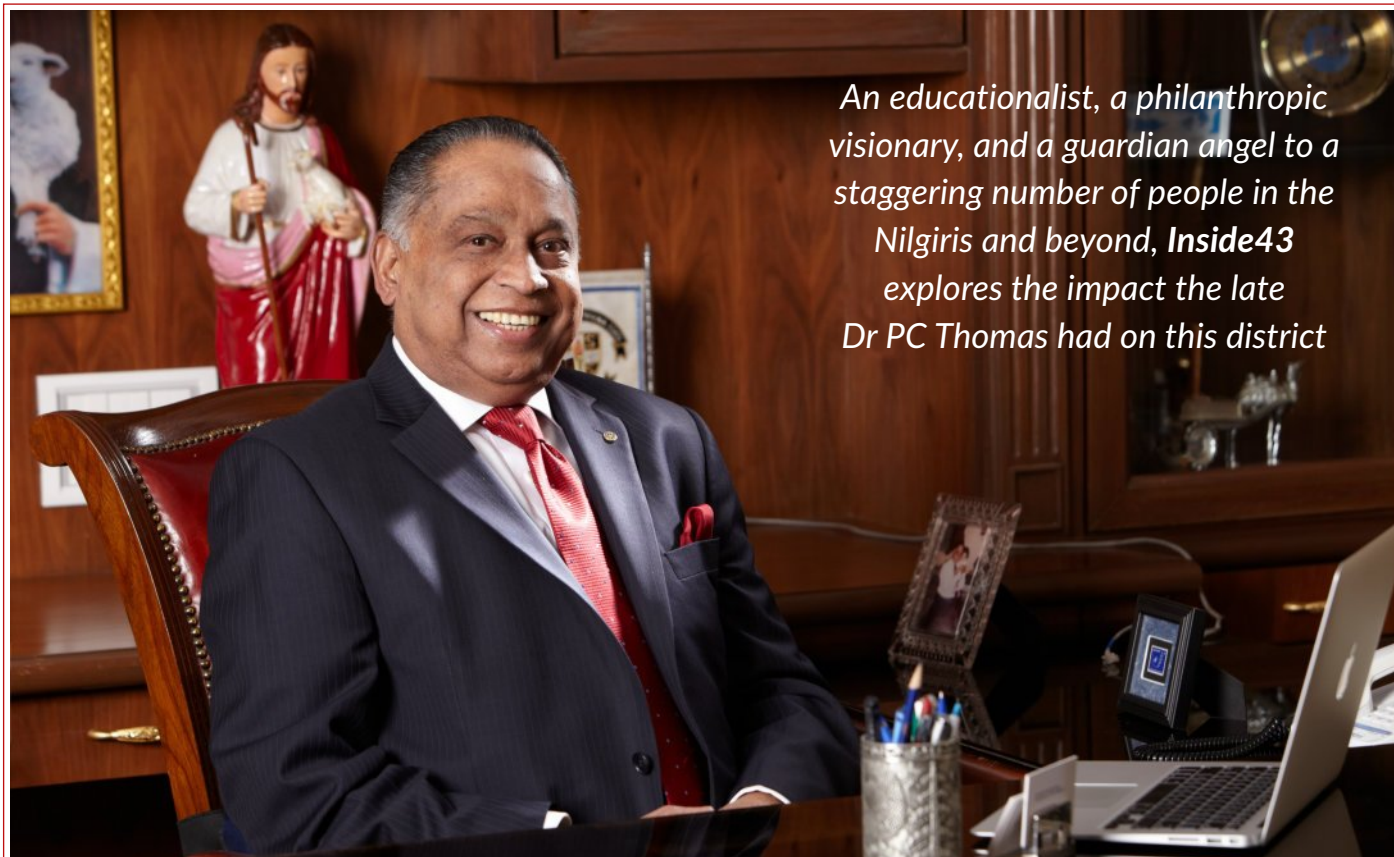
...gold, silver and precious stones make it better.



KRIYAAN

at TULSI MALL
31, Mount Pleasant Road
Coonoor - 643102
+91 96261 62626

A Continuing Legacy



An educationalist, a philanthropic visionary, and a guardian angel to a staggering number of people in the Nilgiris and beyond, Inside43 explores the impact the late Dr PC Thomas had on this district

The school is well-known. The man behind the school is equally so. Unsurprising, as he built an educational institution of such merit and standing that its reputation has reached far beyond Indian borders. Dr PC Thomas was the guiding light that sparked the educational phenomenon called Good Shepherd International School in Ooty and even after his passing in 2020, he continues to illuminate a path of excellence for others to walk on. The school was built on his personal vision and character, and was set up to deliver academic excellence, with emphasis on character development and a values-based education. It was his

firm aim that, through education, one could contribute towards the greater good of society by creating a more equitable and sustainable future for everyone. He believed in compassion and service as the foundations of a good schooling, and it is these principles that guide the functioning of the school, even today.

The renowned international residential school is the realisation of the one man's vision, but establishing Good Shepherd International School was just one of the many things he did, in a life that was filled with a series of philanthropic and social welfare

activities. Rooted in his deep seated belief in the transformative power of education, his vision extended to several activities within the District, State and National levels to transform the lives of innumerable individuals and communities. With a mission to create an institution that would be recognised for the quality of its education, and man-making abilities, irrespective of the background or circumstances of the students, Dr Thomas, along with his wife, Elsamma Thomas, founded Good Shepherd Public School in 1977 at Mowbray House, offering classes from LKG to Std VI. Driven by their joint passion for education, both

founders dedicated their lives to nurturing young minds. Good Shepherd Public School followed the Cambridge IGCSE and was renamed Good Shepherd International School (GSIS) in 1995.

Local to Global

From its humble beginnings as a small, local institution in 1977, the school has since grown into one of the premier educational institutions in India, renowned for its academic excellence, diverse curriculum, and emphasis on character development and values-based education. Today, GSIS stands as a testament to late Dr Thomas' commitment to providing a nurturing space for growth and learning to students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and geographical backgrounds. He was a firm believer in continuous education, with an emphasis on the need to prepare future generations for a world that was to come. "Truth, Trust, and Triumph", the motto of the school, was his personal mantra by which he lived his life, leading by example, at every instance. The impact was felt by students, teachers and all those who met this dignified and quiet-spoken gentleman.

One Man, Diverse Roles

Dr Thomas assumed several roles that benefited from his vision and unwavering commitment for accessible and inclusive education. These included, President of the Rotary Club of Nilgiris West, President of Nilgiris Education Society, Member of the Management Board of Brecks School, and Chairman of the Managing Committee of Emerald Heights College for Women. In addition to his efforts to make education accessible, Dr PC Thomas

was deeply committed to improving and enhancing the quality of life for marginalised communities in and around Ooty.

Towards the cause of those less fortunate, this remarkable man donned many hats in order to contribute in whatever way he could, for the betterment of those beyond the boundaries of the school. Through various philanthropic and social initiatives, he addressed pressing social issues to create a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

As the Charter Secretary of Ooty Round Table No 55, Dr Thomas undertook numerous civic improvement plans in the Nilgiris district. He was the Founder President of Citizens' Forum, Ooty, ensuring that the forum played a key role in addressing various civic issues, enhancing community engagement, and promoting sustainable development initiatives. Dr Thomas had the unique dual honour of being appointed as the first Chief Traffic Warden of Ootacamund by the State Government of Tamil Nadu as well as participating in an Expert Committee Panel to revise the Master Plan for this hill station. Through collaborative efforts with local authorities and active participation from residents, Dr Thomas spearheaded initiatives to improve infrastructure, enhance public amenities, and preserve the natural beauty of Ooty. His impactful leadership and unwavering commitment to the welfare of the community have left a lasting impact, making Ooty a more vibrant, inclusive and liveable town for its residents and visitors alike.

The aphorism of 'think global and act local' certainly holds true in his case. Dr Thomas was appointed a member of the Architectural and Aesthetics Aspects (AAA) committee by the District Collector of the Nilgiris, where his contributions led to the significant preservation and enhancement of Ooty's architectural heritage and aesthetic appeal. With his advocacy, Dr Thomas played a crucial role in guiding urban development projects, ensuring that they aligned with the town's unique character and cultural heritage. He worked hard to ensure that Ooty maintained its charm while facilitating responsible growth and infrastructural improvements that would serve the everyday lives of the residents of the hill town. As a lifetime member of the YMCA, the Indian Red Cross Society, and the Bible Society, he undertook initiatives in the areas of hospitality, charity, rescue and emergency aid missions as well as spiritual enrichment.

Mark of a Man

Anyone who knew him, knew a man of quiet dignity and gentle strength. Never did he utter a word of his many charitable undertakings or mention the many lives he touched. He lived the principle of the right hand not knowing what the left did. In the thousands of students he mentored, the town he tirelessly served, and in the family he left behind - that are taking forward his legacy - Dr PC Thomas was a man who left a mark. His presence is still felt to this day, despite his absence, and with his passing the Nilgiris district has lost one of its most remarkable and committed citizens. Ask anyone who knew him... ■



THE DOCTOR IS (ALWAYS) IN

Dr (Lt Col retd) Anil Kumar Shinde needs no introduction in the Nilgiris, having served the country, and especially this district, with a level of medical dedication that is rarely seen. Here is a glimpse of his life in the hills in his own words

I first came to the Nilgiris in 1982, on posting, as the medical specialist to the Military Hospital in Wellington. After the hustle of Delhi, it was a welcome relief. The red-roofed colonial buildings, sprawling inside an immaculately kept compound felt more like a resort, than a hospital, but the usual business of life played out everyday. We attended church, we made friends who have stood the test of time, and my wife and I decided to retire here, much to the annoyance of our daughter, who was not happy about small-town life even as a child.

We moved to Coonoor, after I took premature retirement from my army career, despite job offers that poured in from the West. Do we regret this? Absolutely not! In my time here, as a family doctor, in a little hill district, I have had privileges and experiences that were blessings that I may never have found elsewhere. I was able to serve Field Marshall Sam Manekshaw in his moments of medical need, and he went on to become a good friend, one I dearly miss even today. I have treated CEOs and auto drivers, met with politicians and State heads and

been part of the fabric of a community in a way that only a small-town doctor can be. I have been a part of peoples' lives across generations, treating grandparents, and then their grandchildren, decades later. I have held parents who wept at the loss of their children, and brought back people from the brink of death. I have watched this community grow from a small little village into a bustling township, and I have helped direct its course in some small way, I hope.

Today, at 85, I drive down to the market, where I am greeted with smiling faces who recognise me despite my grey hair and the lines on my face that mark the passage of time spent in the Nilgiris. And while I may not often remember their names, I do seem to recall their various ailments. After almost 40 years of treated sniffles and cardiac arrests, I retired from practice. I closed my clinic in Bedford Circle, in Coonoor, and looked forward to watching the tea grow and catching up on some reading. But the telephone kept ringing with people calling for medical

advice. The doorbell often rings too, with an emergency case that needs my help. Friends who have aged with me require medical assistance from time to time. And so I haven't really retired, I suppose, and this is the beauty of doing what I do, in a small district like ours.

Where everyone knows everyone, and there is such a spirit of unwavering community, the doctor is always in. ■

Dr Shinde is one of the Nilgiris' best-known medical practitioners, a decorated army officer, a tambola caller of some distinction and a quiet humanitarian. He was Clinical Tutor at AFMC in the Department of Medicine, served for five years at the prestigious Army Hospital of Research and Referral, New Delhi, and was physician to the Pakistani top brass while they were POW in India. Known to everyone as 'Doc', and his family as Chommy, he has won awards for his service to the medical community and has been an indispensable part of life in this district for over four decades.

Earth, Spirit and Fire



Tarangini: of Soil & Soul, seeks to revive the legacy of indigenous recipes rich in wholesome, healthy ingredients with an emphasis on nutrition and local, sustainable sourcing to enhance the harmony between the Soil and the Soul. The menu includes hearty soups, nutritious salad bowls and balanced platters that include vegan and gluten-free options.



Habba Kadal, 38, Coonoor-Kattabettu-Kotagiri Road, Yedapalli, Tamil Nadu 643103

☎ +91 93610 36732 www.habbakadal.in

INSPIRED CUISINE

C E L E S T E ✨



*Exotic European & Pan-Asian
Preparations*

12:00pm to 10:00pm

N I R V A N A ✨



*Traditional & Progressive
Flavours of North India*

12:00pm to 10:00pm

D I V I N O 🍸



*Elegant Decor & Bespoke
Infusions*

Happy Hour from 4:00pm

E U P H O R I A ✨



*Delicious Confections &
Pure Indulgence*

12:00pm to 10:00pm

MindEscapes®, Nilgiris

7/7 B4A, Yellanalli Mynala Road
Yellanalli, Ketti Panchayat
Nilgiris - 643243



☎ +91 94890 52222

✉ mindescapes.in/dining

🌐 www.mindescapes.in