

Smells and sounds of Marredpally

As time takes Secunderabad to its bicentennial, I muse over the sights, sounds and smells of my childhood in the 60's when life in our smug Marredpally neighbourhood glided from one day to the next on simple sensibilities.

Having presided over the affairs of a large joint family from his commodious Ranigunj home, my great grandfather Diwan Bahadur Venugopal Mudaliar (a legal luminary), moved in 1945 to the 'Judges Bungalow,' official residence of the district and sessions judge in the newly created urban extension of the Secunderabad Cantonment, called Marredpally. Here, the various progeny of his now splintered clan translocated to their own nuclear homes, yet losing none of their familial bonds within the proximity of its gracious grid.

All of Marredpally became an extended family.

Mine is the fourth generation of dyed-in-the-wool Marredpally gentility, though clearly the last to reminisce on the smouldering embers of its golden years.

Each day, as we awoke outdoors under a canopy of fading stars, we could hear a Dakota drone over darkened tree tops. To the pealing chime of St Mary's Church, frenzied droves of parrots flapped into the gilding dawn.

In an amazing acoustic phenomenon, morning breeze from the south-west carried on its waves, clearly audible arrival announcements from the Secunderabad Railway Station.

Through the morning, various tradesmen came in succession, selling their wares and providing street services. *Kalai watas* would collect blackened brass utensils from several neighbouring homes before settling for the working day on a footpath under a shady tree.

Mattress-makers would suspend their apparatus with garage rafters. Resembling a gigantic bow strung across a wooden paddle, its

deep rhythmic twang made dense lumpen cotton disintegrate into clouds of white fluff which settled like drifting snow flakes onto everything from clothes to eyebrows.

In a starched dhoti, coat and black cap, Sangaiah would arrive with his sewing machine strapped across the back of a bicycle. 'Gents Tailor' by appointment to three generations of the family, he would settle down for the day over a mat spread on the verandah floor. Here he would cut and sew together new garments to measured perfection or use a *masta* piece of stabilised dimensions as reference for those of us who had passed the growing years. Old clothes that needed darning or alteration would

be bundled with *pyjama nada* and taken home to be worked and returned on his next visit.

For corpulent curry puffs and the crunchiest



patli samosas this side of the Musi, one headed for Garden Restaurant at the Clock Tower. Here bills were computed over a clickety abacus and verbally communicated across the cash desk by the rubicund proprietor.

Their other delicacy was the Japanese cake. This bite-sized pastry consisted of two chocolate flavoured discs which sandwiched a cylindrical glob of fluffy sugared cream, smeared on the periphery with desiccated coconut. Stocks depleted rapidly, and 4.30 pm was the only hour of assured availability. Give that neither chocolate nor coconut are intrinsic to Japanese cuisine, I wonder now about the origin of their nomenclature. Clues, anyone?

(To be continued tomorrow)

The writer, **Yeshwant Ramamurthy**, is the great-grandson of Diwan Bahadur Venugopal Mudaliar, who came to the city with the British around 1918 to work as an administrator. Ramamurthy is an architect and has his own firm in the city.

Of Percy's warm bread home-delivered

The confectionery at Percy's Hotel in Secunderabad was legendary in the 60's and 70's. For those who couldn't visit its quaint compound on the Parade, they home delivered on a bicycle fitted with a tin trunk whose lifted lid released a delicious whiff of warm bread right through the main door. Spongy fresh loaves of unsliced bread came neatly wrapped in folded butter paper tied with a string, both of which were saved and recycled for packing sandwiches. Monthly bills were settled by a simple verification of the daily entries recorded in a small book maintained by the Percy's delivery man. One page for each household. Those being phoneless times, grandmothers used to courier messages to each other by simply slipping a chitty into the relevant page to be discovered at the other end when the bread reached the doorstep.



Waiting for the vendors

When phones did come in Secunderabad, one had to apply and wait for a connection. The process stretched indefinitely over many months, culminating in the momentous installation of a bulky black Bakelite instrument that heralded one's arrival into the rarefied strata of joyous phone-connected bourgeoisie. Visits by lesser fortunate neighbours became more frequent as they popped in to make or receive personal calls, often lingering for chai and a chat.

Long-distance communication necessitated power-packed vocal chords. One had to book a call. Either 'number' or 'pp', and wait. And wait, and wait! Whereas the operator connected you to whoever answered the phone in the first case, a specifically named individual would have to come on the line in the second, for which facility the caller paid a premium. The meter raced through the first three minutes of garbled yelling to be rudely interrupted by the operator telling you that the time has run out barely as you had gotten past the initial how-are-you from a long list of pre-prepared what-to-say priorities.

Lightning calls were put through instantaneously and were mainly used to communicate bad news about the dear departed.

In Marredpally where we lived, a lot of food suppliers came to the door all through the day. Colourful country fowl would be singled out for scrutiny from a flat round basket covered with a conical sheath of rope netting that resembled a wigwam. Its edibility would be established by parting the feathers to examine under the wing for tenderness — something we never dared attempt for all the hysterical flapping and squawking that went in upturning the unsuspecting bird before it was beheaded near the *mor*.

When fridges did come, they completely revolutionised the supply, marketing, cooking and consumption patterns of people in Secunderabad and elsewhere. Indeed, the altered parameters of home economics were sadly synonymous with a dwindling patronage of the humble street vendor. The more we stocked-up, the less we interacted with those fascinating players that peopled our day in Marredpally. To be fair, fridges had their joyous side. Ice cream on call, custards and souffles suddenly sprang on to the widening repertoire of chilled desserts. But it also meant gradual isolation from little pleasures in society, an indication of changin' times. And how the times have changed!

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