

# **A. Dharmalingam**

*Journalist of The Nilgiris*

**Developments in Post-Independence Decades**

*Edited by*

**Dharmalingam Venugopal**

**Nilgiri Documentation Centre**

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## Foreword

I do not believe I ever met A. Dharmalingam. I say this rather tentatively as I, in my ninth year at that time, spent nearly a month in Ooty in 1954 with my parents. It is impossible that my father, the late Devadas Gandhi, who was Managing Editor of 'The Hindustan Times', would have failed to meet this unusual fellow-walker on the street of ink. And I as one, who had attached himself to his father's hands, going wherever he went, sitting by his side wherever he settled down for a chat or a coffee, or just to take the beauty of the Nilgiris in, must have been an impish and irritating interference in their conversation. And A. Dharmalingam would not have missed the chance to spend as much time as he could have with this visitor who was also a friend of his own editor, Kasturi Srinivasan.

Reading this little book on the engaging life of this field journalist is an absolute delight. It brings to life more than one man's story. It opens up as if through a mist, the kind one sees of any morning in the Nilgiris, the rich and riveting life in those hills, and then again, not just as A. Dharmalingam saw it, but as he recalled it from his own reading and research.

This book is both a biographical study of a most fascinating person and a geographical biography of an area, the Nilgiris. Dharmalingam was not just knowledgeable about the place he belonged to but was in love with it, in awe of it. One might say he was obsessed with it. And what an enchanting obsession that was!

Apart from a most heart-warming memoir by his son, Dharmalingam Venugopal, the volume contains a careful selection of his writings on the place, giving us glimpses of visitors to it. It also offers through cameos and vignettes word-pictures of the little events and occurrences in the tract which have long since left active public recalling and narratives.

The circumstances of a tragic plane crash in 1950, the "Late Blight" on the hills' potato crops, the revival of Toda embroidery, are only few of the exquisite depictions which tell us of how time and the Nilgiris have engaged each other.

I congratulate Sri. Venugopal on compiling this study of his father, which if not done now and by his hands of filial understanding, may never have come to be done. And certainly not with this compelling appeal.

**Gopalkrishna Gandhi**

Chairman, Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai

Chairman, Governing Body, Indian Institute of Advanced Study

Former Governor of West Bengal

## Preface

Every profession has a set of universal values. So does journalism. Journalistic values are the same whether one reports international or local news; political or 'page three' news; defence or development news.

Today these values have come under severe pressure what with 'paid' and 'planted' news doing the rounds globally. The very purpose and principles of one of world's oldest professions has come under question.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of greatest journalists ever lived, said, 'In the very first month of Indian Opinion, I realized that the sole aim of journalism should be service'.

In recent years Mark Deuze, has listed 'five ideal-typical traits or values' of journalism as public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics.

Tan Hongkai, a Chinese reporter writes, "I think journalism anywhere should be based on social justice and impartiality, making contributions to society as well as taking responsibility in society. Whether you are capitalist or socialist or Marxist, journalists should have the same professional integrity."

My late father Andi Dharmalingam conformed steadfastly to the purpose and principles of true journalism for nearly fifty years in the Nilgiris. He could have moved on to the state level (with 'The Hindu') or to the national level (as suggested by the legendary editor of 'Indian Express', Frank Mores) but my father was content to think globally but act locally.

He reported news truthfully, accurately and fearlessly. As John Burns of 'New York Times' said, 'I have to be accurate; I don't have to be impartial'.

He feared no one but was never impolite or rude. He spoke his mind naturally and spontaneously no matter how big or important the person being spoken to. As Helen Thomas says, 'I do not think a tough question is disrespectful'.

This volume has two purposes. One, it will hopefully make a happy reading for the thousands in Nilgiris and elsewhere to whom my father had endeared himself during his lifetime by his service, honesty and integrity.

Secondly, the collection of his articles presented here covers the developments in the Nilgiris in the immediate decades after independence, a period on which not much literature is available.

*. “Dedicated to  
My dear mother who was a  
simple, yet a noble soul”*

## Acknowledgement

I gratefully acknowledge 'The Hindu' for providing me with copies of father's articles and news items from their archives.

I am extremely grateful to Shri.Gopalkrishna Gandhi, former Governor of West Bengal and Chairman, Kalakshetra Foundation for his kind and generous foreword.

I am thankful to Mrs. Kamala, Ooty for providing editorial support for writing the biographical sketch of my father.

I thank all those who provided bits and pieces of information about my father.

I acknowledge the contribution of my family to bring out this publication.

This book is dedicated to my dear mother .

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## Introduction

My father Andi Dharmalingam was a well known person in the Nilgiris for nearly fifty years. Yet, we, his children, knew very little about him. He hardly ever spoke, let alone share his thoughts with us. So what follows is mostly what I have heard or gathered from different sources. Let me start from where he was born.

### Kannerimukku

It was the time prior to 1818, when the British had not yet set foot on the Nilgiris soil but had only 'viewed it from the plains of Coimbatore province'. Nothing was known to the low lying world around the verdantly hilly district.

The 'Neilgherry' district was then traditionally divided into four divisions or *simes* or divisions in Badaga. Todanadu, Mekunadu, Porangadu and Kunde were the four Badaga territories that comprised the district. Porangadu division formed the North Eastern division of the Nilgiris centering on Kotagiri and roughly coterminous with the present Kotagiri taluk.

Two kilometers North of Kotagiri town is the hamlet Kannerimukku (meaning mountain black plum+corner) historically known for being the earliest of British settlements. To the West of Kannerimukku lies the hamlet of Dimbatti (meaning pillow like place+village). The British called the whole area the Dimbatti valley.

John Sullivan, the Collector of Coimbatore district (from 1815 to 1830), which then included the Nilgiri mountains, camped at Kannerimukku in 1819 on his first visit to the Nilgiris.

The Sullivan Bungalow or the 'Pethakal Bungalow', as the locals call it, at Kannerimukku marked the first ever European settlement in the Nilgiris. Sullivan stayed there during the various visits to the hills until the end of March 1823, when he shifted his establishments to Stonehouse at Ooty.

After Sullivan moved to Ooty, the Pethakal bungalow became the property of the Church Missionary Society. Later, the bungalow and six other similar cottages were sold to Mr. S.R. Lushington, then the Governor of Madras, who generously bequeathed them for the use of sick and indigent English soldiers.

The bungalow was subsequently owned by a Parsi firm, Framjee and Company, for many decades before it went into disuse around 1880. More than a century later, the bungalow was renovated in 2002 as a landmark of local history. Since 2006 it is under the care of Nilgiri Documentation Centre (NDC) which is running a Nilgiri History Museum and Documentation Centre there.

Kannerimukku hamlet has four streets - Moroday, Nadu Keri, Mokke Keri and Alakambai. The hamlet had the benefit of having nearby one of the earliest schools in the district, thanks to Sullivan's initiative for starting schools on the hills. The Mission Compound, where most of the early missionaries to the Nilgiris took up residence, overlooks Kannerimukku from the South.

## Andi Gowder

The families of brothers Karia and Penna lived in Mokke Keri. Karia's son K. Andi Gowder, who had studied up to eighth form, rose up to prominence in employment, wealth and status.

### Bayly and Brock

Early English education created among the Badagas a new class of 'Writers', who were employed by the English plantations and companies. Andi Gowder was the Writer and Head Clerk of Messers. Bayly and Brock from its inception in the early 1900s. He was drawing a monthly salary of close to Rs.300! His eldest son Matha and brother-in-law, Matha Gowder, were Clerk and Accountant respectively in the Company.

Bayly and Brock is described in 'Southern India: its History, People, Commerce and Industrial Resources' (1914) by Somerset Playne, J.W. Bond and Arnold Wright as follows: "The extensive business of this company as dealers in high class coffee and tea was established in 1903 when a specialty was made of supplying customers with those commodities direct from the Company's own estates or from those of which they are managers ..... In addition to coffee and tea business the company also undertake civil engineering contracts and they are local agent for the Atlas Insurance Company ... A large number of hands are employed permanently under the supervision of the Managing Director."

Unusual for Badagas of his time, Andi Gowder built his first house, 'Lower Rickford' away from the village but bad omen forced him to come back to the village where he built an independent house, 'Peak View' in 1905.

Andi Gowder was tall, imposing and commanded respect among Englishmen and locals. A local Tamil poet described him thus:

*"Need thousand eyes to behold him  
He is the mighty-looking K. Andi Gowder  
Is he king? Is he emperor?  
Is he our Protector and Benefactor?"*

Andi Gowder and his wife Ruby from Jakkanarai village had several children. My father, Andi Dharmalingam was the last of the sons.

Towards the late 1930s the family's fortune took a tumble. The company closed the shop. The reversal of fortunes took the lives of my father's eldest brother Matha and his wife, Rukmani, who was the eldest sister of my mother. That was the beginning of the end of Andi Gowder's domain.

The obituary in 'The Hindu' inserted by my father on August 8, 1952 on the death of his father Andi Gowder read:

“K. Andi Gowder, formerly of Messrs. Bayly and Brock Ltd, Donnington, Kotagiri (Nilgiris) and Honorary Special Bench Magistrate for over eight years and a prominent figure in the Nilgiris about 20 years ago passed away on August 1st after a long illness at the age of 68 years.”

## ANDI DHARMALINGAM

My father, Andi Dharmalingam was born in Kannerimukku on January 11, 1916. He had his early schooling in the nearby elementary school. For high school, he had to go to Hubbathalai, which then boasted the first high school in a Badaga village. There he stayed under the care of Rao Bahadur Late Shri. Ari Gowder, the first graduate and leader of the Badaga community.

Just as he was finishing school, the fortunes of the family changed. He did not complete school as he plugged in mathematics. With further education ruled out, he had to be self-taught. My father developed contact with a number of eminent Christian missionaries who lived in the Mission Compound just above Kannerimukku. He picked up from them the basics of English language, manners, etiquette and values.

From about his fortieth age, my father wore a suit and hat. It gave him a distinct identity. Even when travelling in the plains he would wear cotton suits. Never a crease, not a fleck, never natty, he kept his suits and shoes neat and polished preserving them for decades.

A more detailed account of my father's early days follows in an article by R. Nanjan who had known my father intimately for many years.

### **The Journalist : Early influence**

It was with the influence, encouragement and blessings of eminent British and Indian residents and visitors to Kotagiri that my father started life as a journalist at a young age of about 14.

How he got his first and only typewriter is interesting. An American reporter leaving Madras had advertised in the classifieds of 'Madras Mail' that he wanted to dispose of his Royal typewriter. He was amused when he received a response from a remote village in the far away Nilgiris. Drawn by curiosity, he came all the way to Kannerimukku village, handed over the typewriter and wished my father the best. More helpful encounters followed.

### **C.F. Andrews**

During the non-cooperation movement in the 1930s, Deenabandu C.F. Andrews, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi sojourned in Kotagiri

for rest and to catch up with his writings. Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru had sent his stenographer Mr. M.O. Mathai to assist him. After a few days, a restless Mr. Mathai, who was desperate to get back to Delhi, heard of my father who had no knowledge of stenography but willing to learn. As destiny would have it, he entrusted the work to my father and left for Delhi. For the next more than three months my father was the stenographer and assistant to Rev. Andrews. The association with Rev. Andrews had a profound influence on my father and laid the foundation for a true future journalist.

### **Gandhiji**

My father was devoted to Gandhiji like most Indians were at that time. Mahatma Gandhi visited Nilgiris from January 31 to February 4, 1934. I am sure my father would have accompanied Gandhi's entourage every minute of the tour. Unfortunately the papers carrying his reported writings before coming to Ooty were destroyed.

Gandhiji itinerary went like this: He arrived at Coonoor on January 29, 1934 from Mettupalayam. On January 31, he laid the foundation stone of Harijan School, Ramnagar at Coonoor. On February 2, he spoke at a public meeting at Kotagiri. The meeting was attended by about 6000 people, mostly Badagas. My father's elder brother Madha Gowder had the privilege of presenting the welcome address, which he concluded with a request to accept a purse of 'coppers (copper coins) from paupers'. Gandhiji was moved by the phrase and believed to have used it elsewhere.

As the stenographer to C.F. Andrews, my father had the opportunity to type several communications addressed to Gandhiji. He also tried to follow Gandhian principles and practices as much as he could. Every day he never missed cleaning the toilets and drainage. He totally avoided waste. He abhorred corruption. He shunned any kind of luxury or extravaganza. And from the time he earned his first salary to the last day of service he meticulously kept accounts to the last paisa. He also maintained a diary throughout his working life and jotted down everything truthfully, both personal and professional.

### **Sarat Chandra Bose**

Between June 1942 and May 1945, Sarat Chandra Bose, brother of legendary Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was under house arrest in

Coonoor. On one occasion he was allowed to address a public meeting. As he spoke he could not help noticing this young local lad keenly taking notes. At the end of the meeting he called for the boy and asked to see his notes. He was greatly impressed. When my father with youthful eagerness explained that he was freelancing for some dailies, Mr. Bose predicted for him a prominent future as a journalist. Prophetic words as by the grace of God and my father's hard work saw him go on to become the foremost of modern Journalists in the Nilgiris.

He first wrote for 'Madras Mail', a pro-British daily. In 1942 he joined 'The Hindu', a staunch nationalist daily. From 1944 to 1973 he served on it as its Staff Reporter and Staff Correspondent for the Nilgiris based in Ooty. After retirement he represented United News of India from 1974 till the end of December 21, 1993.

### **Principled journalism**

Right through his career my father practiced principled and ethical journalism. He was never the one for sensationalism or what is called in journalese 'churnalism'! When a dispute broke out in Gudalur between the government and forest encroachers, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu simply filed my father's report in 'The Hindu' as the government's affidavit in the court.

Often, he would intervene responsibly to resolve a public dispute or a clash before reporting them. In one such incidence a fierce clash broke out in Ooty between NCC cadets from North and South in which many students got hurt. My father was having lunch when the call came. He immediately ran all the way to the scene of the clash and pacified the students with the help of the police. In consultation with the district Collector he arranged for the students from the North to leave immediately by a special train. He made sure the local press did not report the clash till the boys had safely crossed the Tamil Nadu border for fear of the clash snowballing into a regional conflict. He reported it on the day after.

### **Hindi agitation**

What old timers will not easily forget is his intervention at the height of the Hindi agitation in 1965 at Charing Cross. Students had gathered in large numbers daring the police who were under orders to shoot if the



students broke the cordon. All efforts by the Collector and the Superintendent of Police had failed. With tension mounting every moment, my father took a leap of faith. Alone, unarmed he ventured up to the sloganeering students who were turning violent.

There were raised voices and vociferous arguments. A lone voice contended with the din of student rage. Then, an unbelievable sight, – the deadly defiance crumbled - the students slowly dispersed. Great was the relief as sanity returned! His powers of persuasion had prevailed on an otherwise nasty scenario.

A few days later in a case of mistaken identity a mob of students and public almost lynched my father. He had a providential escape. The agitators recognized him in the nick of time.

No matter what, my father's principles were propelled by public good. Once, a top official of the Hindustan Photo Films, a public sector undertaking in the district, shared sensitive information over a drink. Because it concerned public interest my father reported it much to the chagrin of the official.

### **Nilgiri Collectors**

My father's association with the District Collectors of the Nilgiris date from 1942 when he was required to be stationed at Ooty as representative of 'The Hindu'. Early Collectors like Mr. Gwen, Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Lobo Prabhu were very close to my father. Father was involved deeply in the welfare and development of the district. It used to be said that the district was run by the trio of the District Collector, the Superintendent of Police and 'The Hindu' Correspondent.

Personal etiquette was very important to my father. Even if they were younger to him, he would address the officials with due respect. But he could not brook breach of etiquette, however big the person might be.

Mr. Ahluwalia was a popular Collector who is still gratefully remembered for bringing Parsons Valley waters to Ooty town. He had implicit faith in my father and never went against his counsel regarding local matters. The good relationship snapped suddenly one evening.

That evening my father was cordially in discussion with the Collector in his chamber. At that time a small group of sisters of charity were

ushered in by the Dawali. They had come personally to request assistance. The Collector while sympathetically listening to their representation unconsciously and unseemly put both his legs on the table unmindful of the sisters before him. That lit the fuse. The moment the sisters exited, my father exploded challenging Mr. Ahluwalia as to how dare he could be this impolite to the sisters. It was a reprehensible. Father called it 'disrespect to God.' Mr. Ahluwalia was at first taken aback. Then he went on to defend himself, curtly uttering it was his personal business. Father didn't stop there. He sternly gave him a dressing-down on how a public servant should behave in public. From that day onwards Mr. Ahluwalia became the sworn enemy of my father, which led to many unpleasant incidents. I think towards their retirement they patched up.

### **Municipality**

My father had a running feud with the Ooty Municipality for a long time. The grievance of the Chairman and Councillors was that my father was not regularly attending the Council meetings to report the proceedings. My father always took the stand that it was not his job to report what the Councillors promised to do for the town, contending that he would only report implementations of the Council decisions.

### **Nationalist**

As a journalist, though he had close contacts with eminent British officials of those times including Governors like Sir Arthur Hope and Gen. Sir Archibald Nye, my father was a staunch nationalist and contributed his every mite to the emergence of the Freedom Movement in the district. He never allowed his 'English' values interfere with his nationalist commitments. He was just as closely associated with Indian leaders as with English governors and administrators.

### **Conversationalist**

My father was called an 'influential person' when the word was used in a positive sense. His vast knowledge of men and matters and his unpretentious uprightness endeared him to all. National and state politicians, Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, Maharajas, Industrialists, Central and State civil servants who visited the Nilgiris during the summer season made it a point to cultivate his friendship because of his helpful disposition, numerous contacts, and sharp memory.

My father was a great conversationalist, magnetizing the high and low with his encyclopedic knowledge and genuine interest in men and matters. When he met a person he would gather his full bio-data and retain it in his memory. Whether he was conversing with a High Court Judge or a common villager, he covered their data 360 degrees. With his razor-sharp memory, he would recall people, places and events like retrieving data from a computer these days! He was a great raconteur who kept his audience in rapt attention and spellbound. In the 1950s and 60s he practically knew everyone who mattered in the state and in the Nilgiris probably knew more people than anybody did.

As was the practice those days, important speeches were reported verbatim. But my father had only a crude and rudimentary knowledge of shorthand. Picture this: Speaker begins the address. This Journalist in the front row invariably closes his eyes, bends his head, for all practical purpose appears to doze and looks up only after the speech is over. It had Late Kamaraj anxious and unsure – *was this Staff Reporter of 'The Hindu' Mr. Dharmalingam sleeping or intently listening!* At the end of the day his faultless reporting spoke for itself!

In fact I always wished my father had written book after books about men and matters pertaining to the State and the district. His phenomenal memory needed no references. But he was convinced such matters are fit only for conversation and not to be put in writing.

### **Helpful nature**

Helping people was his second nature. A normal day would start with the first caller walking in around 7 a.m. The callers would continue through the day except for the time he went out in the morning and evening. He was ever obliging in either counselling, planning, guiding or giving them a patient hearing.

Father always had a soft corner for his community, though he never failed to criticize them for their faults. He would have got educational admission for thousands of students and jobs for hundreds of them – all this out of the personal interest he took in their welfare. He did his best for them through his long association with Kamaraj, Bhakthavatsalam and other leaders.

As far as I remember most of the major disputes among the Badagas were settled in my house. Even in the long drawn dispute between 'Brahmin' and Non-Brahmin Badagas, which ended in 1956, father played a major role in bringing the warring factions together. Even after his retirement he intervened many times to sort out disputes between the Badagas and Sri Lankan repatriates over issues like land encroachment, etc.

Towards the end of the Congress rule in Tamil Nadu my father recommended a candidate from a very backward village for a medical seat. The marks were quite dismal. When the Chief Minister, Shri. Bhaktavatsalam hesitated my father explained, 'Sir, you will know the value of these marks if you can differentiate between buffaloes and children in that village'. The candidate's name appeared in the list of selected candidates from the Forward Classes as the quota for the Backward Classes was over by then!

An incident in this connection is still etched in my mind. It was after lunch when my father normally takes a short nap sitting on the sofa in the front room. Suddenly he came rushing inside the bedroom shouting, 'call the police'. Taken aback my mother and we all rushed to front room. There, the unlettered father of the candidate was standing shivering holding a yellow bag in his hand with a bundle of rupee notes- Rs. 25,000, we were told later.

He told my mother, "Amma, I mean no offence to Ayyah but I was advised by well meaning persons to take the money to Ayyah as it was needed for getting the seat'. My mother advised the old man to take back the money and not to come back till my father's anger was assuaged. My father's abhorrence for corruption and bribe continued to the end.

### **'The Hindu' connection**

Father was emotionally and loyally attached to 'The Hindu'. The Hindu had been kind to my father ever since its legendary Editor Kasturi Srinivasan appointed him in the 1940s. He was also personally close to the family members as they used to visit Ooty regularly in summer.

My father always introduced himself as, 'Dharmalingam of The Hindu' with pride. He would fiercely defend the newspaper against any criticism. At one time, Periyar, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, made a snide

remark against 'The Hindu' in an interview to father. Notwithstanding the great man's eminence, my father spiritedly retorted in defense of the Daily. At another time a Pondicherry Chief Minister went on to pass an ungentlemanly remark against the Paper despite my father cautioning him. My father flew into rage. A Tamil Nadu minister present there had to literally intervene to pull away the men from coming to blows.

Retirement from 'The Hindu' when he still had the health and energy to go on for many years probably caused his decline. He had taken to moderate drinking just before retirement. But, separation from 'The Hindu' slowly but surely depressed him.

I could never understand why retirement shattered him so much until, years later, I saw this drama on Doordarshan on a Pongal day. The protagonist was the well-known Tamil artiste Nagesh. The drama opens with a Pongal festival in a village. Nagesh, an aging farm hand, swaggers in, apparently drunk. He creates a scene before the landlord and his family. After the pooja, the concerned landlord decides to retire Nagesh in view of his advancing age and habit of drinking. He asks his wife to take over the responsibility.

It seems a normal decision, but Nagesh slowly starts to sink to everyone's mortification. On his death bed he expresses a wish to be taken to the land where he had worked all his life. Before breathing his last, Nagesh tells the Landlord, "How wrong you are to think that all these years I have been working for you. I was really working for this land. Now that I am separated from my land I have no will to live anymore!" That, perhaps, was the case with my father too.

## **Last years**

Personally I think my father never got over the calamity that struck his family. He vent his anger more often than not on mother and us. He had a harsh tongue but none of us took them seriously as we knew he never meant ill. He loved us all dearly but never showed it. Though he recommended jobs for so many in the district, he refused to recommend any for his sons. But he did his best to us.

He suffered two strokes which affected his speech and memory but he continued to read 'The Hindu' regularly remembering things off and on.

There was a poignant incident when the noted forensic expert Padma Bhushan Prof P. Chandrasekaran, called on my father during his visit to the Nilgiris. It was an emotional meeting. As a student, the Professor had written a short story under an assumed name in a popular Tamil weekly. On reading it, my father had written a very appreciative letter to the editor predicting a bright future to the writer. That had evidently influenced the Professor to a great extent. But during the meeting my father could not recollect the letter or the professor, who was very disappointed. Then it was suggested to him to name any of his relatives who had distinguished themselves in some ways. After thinking for a while, the Professor wrote the name of his uncle who was a freedom fighter from Salem least expecting my father to make the connection. Barely had he completed writing the name, my father was all excited, wildly waving his hands across his chest in recognition. The professor was extremely happy and explained to us that his uncle stopped wearing upper clothes after Gandhiji decided to do the same.

My father died on December 21, 1993 without much suffering.

## DHARMALINGAM AND I

*R. Nanjan*

My earliest memories of Mr A. Dharmalingam go back to 1936-38 when I was studying in the Methodist Mission Higher Elementary School at Kotagiri. Mr. Dharmalingam had his office room near Kotagiri post office. Daily while returning to my village in the evening after attending school I used to notice him either typing something or reading books. I was then a boy of 14 years. At times he used to call me and talk to me enquiring about our school or about the teaching staff.

After I completed school at Kotagiri I joined Hubbathalai High School in 1939 for my secondary education. I almost lost touch with Mr. Dharmalingam as there was no opportunity for us to meet. From 1939 to 1942 I was at Hubbathalai and afterwards I went back to my village till I joined service in the Taluk Office at Coonoor in 1944. During my stay in the village I used to play badminton in a recreation club at Aravenu. Mr. Dharmalingam used to come to the club once in a while but during tournament times he used to visit the club regularly and it was here I developed a friendship with him. By the time I joined service in 1944, Mr. Dhamalingam had moved from Kotagiri to Ootacamund on his appointment as the Correspondent of 'The Hindu'. But we continued to write to each other. He used to enquire about the nature of my work etc.

There was an occasion for me to meet him at Coonoor when I was working in the Sub Collector's Office. He came to me with one or two villagers from Kotagiri to get some details regarding getting permits for controlled maida, wheat flour etc. Those days there was control for most food items. There were no reliable educated or social minded persons in the Kotagiri area to guide the poor villagers for approaching government authorities for getting their grievances redressed. Mr. Dharmalingam was the only person who was willing to help the people by representing their case to the authorities concerned. In one case he came to represent to the then Sub Collector, Mr J.C. Griffiths ICS for allotment of sufficient maida for Kotagiri bakeries since there was scarcity for maida. Mr. Griffiths was a sympathetic officer. I was then working as a clerk under him and he knew

that I hailed from Kotagiri area. When Mr. Dharmalingam represented the case to Mr. Griffiths the latter asked me whether the representation was genuine. When I replied in the affirmative he immediately sanctioned the required allotment of maida to the concerned people who were very, very happy and the happiest man was Mr. Dharmalingam. I am narrating this incident just to stress the point that Mr. Dharmalingam was always ready to help people. He was also extending his help to the poor educated youth to get employment at various places using his personal influence.

In 1949 I was transferred to Ootacamund. By that time Mr. Dharmalingam had settled down at Ootacamund with his family as Correspondent of 'The Hindu' and kept himself busy. Though Mr. Dharmalingam was an undergraduate he enriched his vast knowledge by hard work and constant reading of books.

He had acquired an insatiable love for books. I had some books left by my previous British house owner. Mr. Dharmalingam always took with him one or two books whenever he came home. The traffic was always one way. Seeing my book shelves fast depleting I asked Mr. Dharmalingam, 'what do you do for a book shelf?' He used reply, 'when I have to take books I need only my hands but if I have to return them, I need a truck'. He never grudged a book lover's right to pinch books. He was lucky to receive books from all sources. Most of his friends preferred to hear him on the books than read the books themselves and I was not an exception. He was a man of complete knowledge not only in the field of literature but also in politics. He used to analyse individual politicians and statesmen and comment on them.

Mr. Dharmalingam was highly duty conscious. He worked hard and was worth his salt. Mr. Dharmalingam was a self-made man and in appreciation of his good work the management of 'The Hindu' appointed him as a Staff Reporter in the fifties and this elevation encouraged him. He used to take the initiative to meet high dignitaries, be it politicians or officials, to squeeze some news from them.

I would like to recall one instance when the great statesman Rajaji visited Ooty. Rajaji was taking a stroll at the Botanical Gardens accompanied by Mr. Dharmalingam. Seeing a fully blossomed rose Rajaji turned to Mr. Dharmalingam and asked him whether any human expert



could create flower petals like that of the rose. Mr. Dharmalingam cryptically replied that natural creation was a divine art while imitation was a human effort. Rajaji gave an understanding laugh.

Mr. Dharmalingam was a strict disciplinarian. He led a simple life with high thinking. He moved with the society very closely and with his endearing qualities there was no one in the district who was not known to him. Some elite of the town used to call him “Kasturi” meaning the Editor of ‘The Hindu’.

Mr. Dharmalingam was a patriot and he had high hopes on the Congress party. I hold the view that he was a strong congressman though he behaved like a non-party man befitting his professional ethic.

Here I am reminded of an instance which confirms he was a congressman deep inside. In one Assembly election Mr. H.B. Ari Gowder, the uncrowned king of the Badaga community stood as an independent candidate against a congress candidate. Mr. Dharmalingam was a sympathiser of the congress candidate. When the campaign was in full swing Mr. Dharmalingam wanted to assess the strength of voters in favour of Mr. Ari Gowder. So he planned a strategy- an act of mimicry- to get at the correct position. One Mr. Daniel, an estate supervisor, who had good influence with the estate labour population was working hard for Mr. Ari Gowder. Mimicking the voice of Mr. Daniel, Mr. Dharmalingam had a conversation over phone with Mr. Ari Gowder, who narrated the actual state of affairs in the election prospects not knowing that the speaker at the other end of the line was Mr. Dharmalingam. This shows how keen was Mr. Dharmalingam in helping the congress candidate. But in the late eighties he had such a contempt for the congressmen in high places and he used to say the country would go to ruins if the congress leaders do not retrace their steps.

Mr. N.M. Lingam, the then member of Parliament and ex-President of the Nilgiris District Board was a close friend of Mr. Dharmalingam. Almost daily they used to meet and discuss about politics and current affairs of the government. When Mr. Lingam was deputed by Jawaharlal Nehru as a member to represent India in the United Nations Assembly in America, there was a meeting at Ooty to felicitate Mr. Lingam on his assignment. This meeting was under the auspices of the Citizens of the Nilgiris District and

the then Collector of the Nilgiris, Mr. O.H. Dias IAS presided over the meeting. Mr. Dias in his speech remarked that N.M. Lingam deserved to be the governor of a state while Mr. Dharmalingam would make a good adviser.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not mention a word about Mr. Dharmalingam's love for music and drama. He used to tell me about the musical and dramatic talents of great musicians like Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi and dramatists like Sri Tyagaraja Bhagavathar and P.U. Chinnappa. Mr. Dharmalingam himself was a talented bathroom singer and his knowledge of music was comprehensive. He had more than a nodding acquaintance with ragas and delicate krithis of Thygaraja and lyrics of Subramania Bharathi.

Till his end he followed the legacy of the British in his dress and manners. He was one among a very few who was well dressed, walking erect on the road with his felt hat and at times with an over coat.

May his soul rest in peace.

*(Mr. R. Nanjan was a retired Deputy Collector and an ardent devotee of Bhagwan Shri Sathya Saibaba.)*

## EXCEPTIONAL ENCOUNTERS

My father had several extraordinary encounters with the high and low during his journalistic career because of his wont to call a spade a spade. Some of the exceptional encounters are recalled here.

### **Kotagiri Club**

Prior to independence Kotagiri Club was a prestigious institution patronized by famous missionaries, members of Indian Civil Service and visiting dignitaries such as Governors and others. It was exclusively for the English and even the local workers had to be dressed formally. Around 1940s, my father was engaged by the 'Madras Mail' to report activities of the Kotagiri Club. He used to borrow the shirts and pants of his brother to attend the functions of the Club. At times when the press was not allowed to cover events, he used to gain entry to the kitchen (as most workers were local Badagas) and listen to the speeches made in the Club by the Englishmen for his news reporting.

It so happened that at the peak of the Quit India movement a visiting Madras Governor (I think it was Sir Arthur Hope) spoke highly of Jawaharlal Nehru in an address to the Club Members. Overhearing the speech from the kitchen my father flashed the news in the 'Mail'. The embarrassed Governor denied having said that. Years later, after his return to England he wrote to my father regretting his denial and lauding him for the news story.

Another incidence was more emotional. Dr. George Arundale, the Theosophist, visited the Club. Gandhiji was in the thick of the Quit India movement. He had exhorted that India should not join the British War effort (Second War). As he was walking through the hall of the Club, Dr. Arundale made a casual remark that Gandhiji should be shot for embarrassing the British government at such a time. My father who was listening to the conversation from behind the curtains literally pounced on Dr. Arundale in full fury. Shocked hosts had to escort my father out of the club.

## **Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru and Madam Indira Gandhi**

My father had a couple of interesting encounters with Pundit Nehru for whom he had a worshipful regard and Madam Indira Gandhi during their visit to the Nilgiris.

The first was in 1959 when, they came to attend the All India Congress Committee Planning Meeting at Ooty. On the day of their arrival Pundit Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi addressed a Press Meet. Reporters from all the major dailies had accompanied the Prime Minister. The Press Meet had assumed significance as the first Communist government in Kerala had been dismissed only months before.

When the Press Meet commenced, my father shot a hypothetical question on dynastic politics. While a visibly annoyed Mrs. Gandhi almost shouted, “impertinent!!”, Pundit Nehru, apparently unruffled, calmed his daughter down saying, “He has the right to ask the question. If you don't want to answer, say you have no comments but don't get angry with him.” Pundit Nehru then turned to my father, smiled by way of a reply and discreetly signaled to the next question.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi's first and last visit as Prime Minister to the Nilgiris was in 1971 to dedicate to the nation the Hindustan Photo Films (HPF). It was the first public sector undertaking she was dedicating after assuming charge as Prime Minister. Hundreds of Press reporters including foreign correspondents had been flown into Ooty. As the crowded Press Conference got off my father posed the first question, “Madam, is this (HPF) all necessary for a small town like Ooty?, Mrs. Indira Gandhi did not answer but, needless to say, the mood of the Press Meet changed totally.

HPF did create jobs for about 2000 locals but it changed the life and face of the once Queen of Hill Stations for ever. Hardly two decades later, HPF became a sick unit.

## **'King Maker' K. Kamaraj**

My father enjoyed the respect and full confidence of the former Chief Minister and national leader K. Kamaraj. Whenever Kamaraj visited the Nilgiris my father had to be with him every minute.

Joining my father on his daily evening walk above the Raj Bhavan was eagerly sought after by many. On one occasion my father had the privilege of having Rajaji as his companion for a whole week. Apart from the solitude of the woods, the conversational gift of my father made every walk memorable.

Kamaraj enjoyed taking a walk with my father in the Wood House next to Raj Bhavan. During one of his walks when the talk came around to family matters, Kamaraj, on impulse perhaps, made an uncharacteristic offer: "Dharmalingam, I am a single person (onndi kattai) and need not worry much about my future. You have five children and it won't be easy to run the family when they grow up. I suggest you apply for the grant of 10 acres of land under the freedom fighters patta scheme. I know you have not been imprisoned to become eligible under the scheme but I can manage that. You deserve it as much as the other freedom fighters..."

Any normal person would have been overwhelmed by this humane gesture by a person whose sense of probity was legendary. But before Kamaraj could complete what he was saying, my father flew into a characteristic rage saying, 'Sir, so you think only people like you could make sacrifices for the country; others, you think, simply joined the crowd to get whatever they could get out of it. It is an insult to honest people like me who took part in the freedom movement ....." I can imagine the effort Kamaraj must've taken to placate my father. The lone security in mufti who trailed them at a distance was helpless.

## **Government Art College**

Kamaraj was responsible for setting up the Government Arts College at Ooty in the mid 1950s in the face of stiff resistance from some of his own colleagues. As the student strength was small in the initial years, the then Education Minister threatened that he would close down the college if the numbers did not go up.

The threat became almost an ultimatum on the eve of the historic visit of the then Soviet leaders Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Krushchev to Ooty in 1958. A panic stricken delegation including the local MLAs and my

father left the same evening to Madras to appeal to Kamaraj. He was visibly dismayed to see them next morning at his residence on Tirumalaipillai Road.

After hearing them, an annoyed Kamaraj chided in his characteristic style. 'How irresponsible you are all! Tomorrow two of the top leaders of the world are coming there (Ooty) and all those who matter are here. If somebody was foolish enough to say that he would close down a college how could you all be foolish enough to believe it. I did not open a petty shop in Ooty to be closed because business is dull. I have opened an educational institution which will educate generations of local people. I do not care how you will do it but you must all get back to Ooty today itself and be ready to welcome the guests tomorrow in a fitting manner!'

During his summer visits to Ooty Kamaraj used to take a stroll in the lawns of the Botanical Gardens in the evenings. No security will be around and anybody can have a word with him. As kids we used lie on the lawn at his feet watching with amusement the gesticulations of the tall man. On one occasion, when a group of tourists from down south met him, he made his customary enquiries regarding their stay and food. After the visitors bitterly complained about the poor lodging facilities, Kamaraj asked my father who was close by as to what happened to the proposal to set up a tourist bungalow to cater to the needs of the middle class tourists. My father replied sarcastically that the location had long been decided but the officials concerned were sleeping over it. On being informed that the proposed site was not very far, Kamaraj suggested that they could take a walk to see the site. To the amusement of all Kamaraj walked from the gardens to the site where the present Hotel Tamil Nadu now stands. After inspection of the site he over the phone directed the officials concerned that the work should begin the next day, come what may. Work indeed started the next day! That's how the first Tourist Bungalow (later renamed Hotel Tamil Nadu during MGR's time) came into existence and later grew into a chain of hotels throughout the state.

My father shared Karmarj's passion for education in equal measure. They used every opportunity to encourage local students, particularly the Badagas, to carry on with education. Badaga elders and boys had the habit

of sleeping on the village meadow during daytime with a bed sheet snugly wrapped around them. Whenever my father and Kamaraj came across such a scene they would stop the car, wake them up and enquire. If anybody was found to have studied up to school or college they will be forced to continue education or take up a job.

### **M.G. Ramachandran**

During the first term as Chief Minister, Late M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) called for an unusual Press Conference at Ooty. His relationship with the press and the media was strained at that time. The Ooty Press Meet was, therefore, packed with nearly fifty representatives of the national and linguistic news groups.

As was his wont, MGR asked all the reporters to identify themselves. When the turn of the reporter from a Tamil daily came, MGR asked the reporter to leave the hall saying that the paper never reported his view correctly.

The reporter tried to explain but MGR was not satisfied and insisted that the reporter should leave the room.

After retirement from 'The Hindu' in 1974 my father continued to represent the news agency United News of India and he attended Press Meets only occasionally. My father who had personally known all the Chief Ministers of the state before and after Independence but had never met MGR.

So when the impasse and MGR's silence prolonged intolerably, my father stood up, introduced himself and explained to the Chief Minister that in a Press Meet all accredited reporters had a right to attend and that it was not proper to ask any of them to leave. Besides, he argued that the Chief Minister's grievance was with the owner of the newspaper - the poor reporter should not be penalized for that. He also quoted the popular saying why blame the arrow when the one who shot the arrow was there.

When the Chief Minister would not budge, my father in his characteristic way told the Chief Minister that if he was so adamant then there was no need for the Press Meet and asked all the reporters to walk out.

The incident shocked and took everyone by surprise. All kinds of consequences were feared. But nothing happened. The great man that he was, MGR had told the ruling party MLA standing next to him, who was father's own nephew, 'This is how a reporter should be'.

MGR returned to the Nilgiris within a few months for a function at Wellington. During lunch seeing the Chief Minister approaching, my father moved to another room. The noble leader sent for my father, asked him to sit next to him, chiding him for remembering things he (MGR) had long forgotten.

## **ITC**

At one time, the top brass of ITC who had come to Ooty on a holiday were booked on charges of infringement of wildlife regulations. Much to their great relief my father intervened and got them extricated without penalty.

The grateful group overwhelmed by my father's stature came home (I still remember the strong fragrance of their perfume) to thank him. The top man impulsively offered to take at least one of the sons under the care of ITC. To his shock my father suddenly turned angry. He scathingly admonished them for suggesting that one of his (father's) son's could take up a job in a 'cigarette' company.

A week later my father's long-time tailor ( Kalaji Rao) called him to come and try out the fitting for his new woollen coat. When my father said he had not given any material, Mr. Rao explained that a week ago some impressive looking gentlemen had come with the material and asked him to inform father only after it was ready.

## **Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer**

For nearly three decades my father had a close association with Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer who deeply loved and contributed significantly to the development and welfare of the Nilgiris. He had told my father that he would like to spend his last days in Ooty but he passed away in London. The



only time when my father gave a public talk was on the death of Sir. C.P. at the request of the Toastmasters Club.

Shri. C.H.V. Pathy Iyer, a legendary journalist from the Free Press Journal and a long time friend of father, used often call Sir. C.P. from my house addressing the great man simply 'C.P.'. Most of the photographs of father with Sir. C.P. and other dignitaries were taken by Pathy Iyer.

During Sir. C.P.'s time we lived just at a stone's throw from his bungalow, 'Delisle' on the Ooty-Kotagiri road. Whenever Sir. C.P. was in town he would summon father any time of the day or night. Many times, Shri. Chidambaram who was Sir. C.P.'s secretary, would beckon father urgently. Father would sometimes leave his meals halfway to run to Sir. C.P.'s house. 'Let him finish his meals here', Sir. C.P. would tell his secretary.

Father covered Sir. C.P.'s events and comments extensively. Old timers in 'The Hindu' used to tell me father had the rare privilege of reporting Sir. C.P. without referring the copy to him.

When Pundit Nehru visited Ooty in 1961 he had tea with Sir. C.P. at Delisle. Pathy Iyer who was busy taking pictures lost his costly flashlight camera when he handed over his camera to a stranger to go to the washroom. Father always held Sir. C.P. in high esteem, which was rather rare for my father.

### **Shri. R. Venkataraman**

My father's association with Shri. R. Venkataram dates back to the former President's stay in the Nilgiris in the 1940s to organize the plantation labourers. Late R.V. played a key role in the development of hydro electric power in the Nilgiris. He was instrumental in forming the Indco tea factories to help small tea growers. My father was a witness to most of these developments. He was also personally close to R.V. My father was, in fact, guardian to Shri. Venkataraman's son, (Mr. Shankar, I think) when he studied in Government Arts College in the late 1950s.

## Governors

Father's association with Raj Bhavan dates to 1940s. Since then he had exceptional association with the governors till the 1970s. Sir. Arthur Hope and Sir. Archibald Nye were closely known to father before Independence. After independence Maharaja Sir Krishna Kumarasinji Bhavsingji, Shri. Bishnuram Medhi, Shri. A.J.John, Maharaja Sir Jayachamraja Wodeyar and Sardar Ujjal Singh were particularly close to father. The governor's staff, starting from the Comptroller General and ADC's to the typists were personally attached to father.

Mr. Farley who was the Gardener of Raj Bhavan in Chennai and Ooty for many years was particularly close to father. The correspondence between them covered much more than gardening.

## Dasaprakash

Not many are aware that the story of Dasaprakash, the once popular chain of hotels in the south, started in Ooty. Shri. Seetharama Rao, the founder had come to Ooty as a teacher, probably in the 1950s. He started a small tea shop to supplement his income. My father knew him from that time. Later, when an old bungalow commanding a panoramic view of the Ooty town came up for sale, Mr. Rao bought it and thus began the Dasaprakash story. My father must have helped him in many ways in the beginning. When Dasaprakash opened in Chennai, Mr. Rao had a wish that it should be declared open by the Governor. At my father's request the then Governor, Maharaja Sir Krishna Kumarasinji Bhavsingji, inaugurated the Madras Dasaprakash around 1952. Till the 1980s, Dasaprakash was a home away from home for father.

Once after several Congress leaders had lunch at Ooty Dasaprakash some of them left without paying the bill. The manager sent one of his room boys after them asking him to bring back the 'man in white dhoti'. The poor boy stopped Kamaraj instead of the nonpayers. With no sign of anger or embarrassment, Kamaraj walked back to the manager, who was by then sweating in fright, enquired about the matter, called back the recalcitrant leaders and asked them to pay the bills.

## ICS and IAS

My father held the members of the ICS and the IAS in very high esteem. Practically, he knew every officer in the Madras service. Late Kamaraj or Bhakthavatsalam had to just ask my father about the background of any officer. He had every information at the tip of his fingers. I can recall names like Shri. P.K.Nambiar, Shri. T.N. Seshan, Shri. T.N. Lakshminarayanan, Shri. V. Karthikeyan, Shri. T.V. Venkataraman. Shri. V. Selvaraj, Shri. A.K. Venketasan who had high regard for father. Former Chief Secretary, Shri. K. Chokalingam was a family friend who used to have breakfast in our house whenever he visited Ooty. When he joined the IAS after being a District Forest Officer, my father and Late N.M. Lingam, then M.P. recommended to the Home Minister Shri. G.B. Pant (through his Press Secretary, Shri. Kuldip Nyar) to allot Shri. Chokalingam to the Madras cadre.

**Selected Articles  
of  
A. Dharmalingam  
1950 – 1976**

## AIR-INDIA PLANE CRASH

*December 21, 1950*

All the 20 persons on board the Air-India Dakota missing since Wednesday last, were dead, a military search party reported to night, after examining the wreckage discovered this morning in the Denad reserve forest near Kil-Kotagiri, 40 miles north of Coimbatore. The party found the plane completely disintegrated and the bodies in decomposed state.

The wreckage of the plane was found in a rocky desolate valley below Rangaswami Hill, eight miles from Kil-Kotagiri.

Kil-Kotagiri is six miles north-east of Kotagiri and ten miles due north of Mettupalayam with an elevation of about 6,000 feet.

The actual place where the plane had crashed was four miles from Kil-Kotagiri. The military party and medical men from Wellington had practically to crawl on hands and feet the last one and a half mile to reach the spot.

Immediately on receipt of information, Messrs. H.C.M. McLaughlin, Collector of the Nilgiris, T.V.M. Wilson, R.D.O., Coonoor, Ayyannah Conservator of Forests, went to the spot.

Kuttappa Kurup, a forest guard and washerman who were the first to spot the wrecked plane and the dead bodies rushed back to Kil-Kotagiri and informed the military authorities who immediately hastened to the spot under the command of Lt-Col. Mukherjee of the Staff College at Wellington.

On getting information, Inspector Mansfield of Ooty Police with his party rushed to the place. The road to the spot lay through five miles of estate and grass forests and three miles down a deep incline.

Inspector Mansfield and party who returned panting after the arduous return climb said the bodies were decomposed and the plane was lying "in a million and one bits". The belongings of passengers were lying scattered about.

A relief military party proceeded to the spot, Mrs. Harry, wife of Mr. Harry (a passenger of the ill-fated plane), his brother and relatives of Mr. R.A. Krishnan (another passenger) are anxiously waiting at Kotagiri to proceed to the spot along with officials tomorrow morning.

Mr. Viswanathan, Inspector of Post Office, Coonoor, had salvaged most of the mails. He was in the party which arrived first. Valuables have also been brought back by the police.

Mr. M. Kesavaunni Nair, Chief Conservator of Forests, Madras, who received information late this evening said that the locating of the plane was delayed probably due to the peculiar topography of the locality with precipitous high mountains and deep valleys, dipping down towards the east into the Moyar river.

### **Bodies buried under wing**

Mr. B.N. Rangaswami, a planter, and Mr. Madhava Panikar, Inspector of Central Excise, Kil Kotogiri, who had gone to the spot, stated that they found only seven bodies of which three could be identified that of Miss Staggs, Air Hostess. The plane was completely wrecked, with its wings and other parts thrown helter-skelter. Under one of the wings of the plane some bodies were found. It appears that the pilot had entirely missed the direction and hit straight against the hill.

Several persons are now coming forward to claim the reward of Rs.500 announced by the D.S.P of Coimbatore for anyone whose first information led to the discovery of the plane.

The Adjutant of the Staff College Wellington, said earlier this morning that the army authorities had received a report that a driver working under Mr. Briscoe, Manager of the Curzon tea estate which is near Rangaswami Betta, had seen with a binocular something which appeared like a wing of a plane. On this information, a military party consisting of 100 officers and Sepoy's led by Lt.Col. Mukherjee of the staff College, proceeded to Rangaswami Betta.

The plane, which was on a scheduled flight between Madras and Trivandrum, last contacted Coimbatore airport for bearings at 10-20 a.m. on Wednesday. It was due to land at Coimbatore airport 12 minutes later.

Following is the list of passengers in the Dakota when it left Bangalore for Coimbatore:

Crew (all Indians): 1. Capt. A.B. Wiseman; 2. Mr. B.N. Ayre (Co-pilot); 3. Mr. K.A. Shenoy (Radio officer); 4. Miss Staggs (Air Hostess).

Passengers from Madras to Trivandrum: (1) Prof. Wald (American), (2) Mrs. Wald (American), (3) Mrs. H. Thein (British), (4) Mr. R.A.Krishnan (Indian).

Passengers from Madras to Cochin: (1) Mr. R.D. Robey (British), (2) Mrs. Robey (British), (3) Mr. C.G. Marshall (British), (4) Mr. F.W. Saile (Swiss).

Passengers from Madras to Coimbatore: Mr. Vincent (Indian).

Following are the seven passengers (all Indians) who boarded the plane at Bangalore: (1) Brig. Abaya Singh, (2) P.L. Kapur, (3) K.R. Bhadran, (4) C.P. Harry, (5) K.B. Menon, (6) J.B. Sud, (7) C. Luke.

### **Madras Governor's sympathy**

His Excellency, the Governor of Madras has sent to Messrs. Air-India Ltd, the following message in connection with the recent mishap to one of their planes:

“I am greatly distressed to hear the news of the accident to your plane in the Nilgiris involving the death of all the passengers and the crew. Kindly accept my sincerest condolences and heartfelt sympathies and please convey them also to the relatives and friends of all the deceased in the terrible disaster”.

### **Inquest on victims**

KOTAGIRI, Dec. 20. According to the latest reports from the spot where the Air-India Dakota had crashed, eighteen dead bodies have been found. The bodies are said to have been decomposed, some of them being mutilated.

As it is considered impossible to remove them from the spot owing to the difficult nature of the terrain, it is proposed to hold the inquest on the spot and dispose them of there itself. Our Coimbatore correspondent adds: Mr. G.K. Devarajulu. Mill-owner of Coimbatore, who is interested in one of the passengers of the plane and who returned late last night after visiting the area close to the place where the plane lay, states that he got information from the military office that almost all bodies have been recovered. The bodies of the Air Hostess who had her handbag with her photo, and the Swiss passenger whose diary was found on his chest were

identified. Bodies of other victims were in a highly decomposed state. He added that most of the belongings of the passengers had been recovered though some of them had been scorched by fire here and there. Isolated injuries due to fire were noticed on some bodies and it is inferred that the plane had not completely burnt. The military were anxious about Brigadier Abaya Singh who was travelling in the plane and was in uniform but they could not identify him.

A Bombay message states:

A special Air-India Dakota, carrying relatives of the passengers and crew who were killed in the Air-India Dakota crash in the Nilgiris, took off from Bombay for Coimbatore at noon today. They will visit the scene of the disaster near Kil Kotagiri.

Brigadier Habibullah, Commander, Bangalore Sub-area who returned to Bangalore from Coimbatore on Monday said that he had flown over the area above the confluence of the Bhavani and the Moyar rivers, where the hills are about 4,000 to 5,000 feet high.

Referring to his vain search for the plane in the Biligiri range, Brigadier Habibullah said that his men had made intensive searches in an area of about 200 square miles and had also combed the best part of the vast area of 1,400 square miles. He added: "On Sunday our patrols were followed by angry tigers and wild elephants." In the jungles where they had made searches all these days 10,000 people could get lost easily without being known to the others.

There were huge trees which looked like a huge carpet of cauliflowers and the steep black rocks did not at all give any help. Patrol parties were sent in all directions. Brigadier Habibullah said that he found the jungle tribe were shy. After the dropping of leaflets from the air by the District Superintendent of Police, Coimbatore, stating that a reward would be given, more people had come forward. He was all praise for the great efforts made by Mr. and Mrs. Morris and the Mysore Police to locate the missing plane.

Brigadier Habibullah told the PTI correspondent that feeling that the number of men detailed for search was too small compared with the area involved, he had got general permission from Major General A.A.Rudra,



G.O.C, Madras Area, to have the whole Second Battalion of the Madras Regiment, numbering 500 to join the search. The entire Biligiri range had been scoured with no results.

### **The Dakota's crew**

Three members of the crew of four, in charge of the Air-India Dakota which crashed in the Nilgiris belonged to Bombay.

Mr. Andrew Browne Wisemen, the chief pilot, joined the Air-India service in 1947, and held the rank of junior captain. He was a flying officer with the Indian Air Force for three and a half years.

Mr Ramnath Narayan Aiyar, Co-pilot, thirty-six year old, was living with his wife and three children at Ghodbunder road, Vila Parle, Bombay. He had a long and varied career as wireless operator, as Radio Officer with Scindia Steam Navigation Company, and the Merchant Navy, He joined Air-India in 1945 as Radio Officer. He proceeded to England and obtained his navigators license. Then he joined Air-India International and was recently promoted to the rank of First Officer, having been selected as a pilot in April last.

Mr. Kasargo Appu Shenoy was 24 years old. He had three years service with the company.

Miss Cynthia Celine Staggs, Air Hostess, was a native of Madras. She recently joined Air-India, and was still on probation.

Mr. P.K. Kapur who was connected with the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay was the managing Director of the Government-sponsored Rare Earth Company Ltd., and was on his way to Trivandrum to take charge of a new scientific laboratory there.

Mr. C.P. Harry, was a resident of Bombay for many years. He was an engineer with the Mukand Iron and Steel Works. Maragaon. Later he was connected with the Westinghouse Electric Company. He assisted in the installation of the air-conditioning equipments at the Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital, Parle. Mr. Harry left Bombay to take up an appointment with the new plastic industry establishment in Tranvancore.