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AWE AND REVERENCE IN BAAL'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

He was "at death's door."

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Story & Photo
by Kavita
Ramcharitar
Photo Editor



Celebrating Life: Mahadeo Baal second from left, his wife Savi, daughters Anardi and Anuja, and sons Avinash and Akash.

It is ascertained that a religious experience will have a definite relation to a person's religious precepts that describe and uphold the belief in the existence and nature of a divine or superhuman power.

It is measured and evaluated within the boundaries of the precepts of the particular religion. The role of the experience is to bring a better understanding of oneself, and a revelation of the sacred, in order to establish, maintain and develop a relationship with the sacred.

Mahadeo (Fatty) Baal is a welder/fabricator and sculptor who lives in Clearwater, Eccles-

ville, Rio Claro. He claims to have had spiritual contact last year with Hindu Goddess Durga Maa when he was "at death's door."

"I had gotten Covid and every one in my family had gotten sick," he recalled. "After two weeks taking care of everyone I collapsed to the ground, and my daughter who was standing next to me saved my life, because I was unconscious." Three days later Baal was admitted to the San Fernando General Hospital with just about 28 per cent of his body functioning properly.

"My fingers and toes were already black, and when I reached the hospital I was in and out of

consciousness," he said. "Hospital officials told my wife and my son to talk to me and hold my hand because they wouldn't see me again."

He was then transferred to the Augustus Long Hospital in Point a- Pierre where doctors spent hours trying to revive him before placing him on a ventilator.

"It was during that time I saw the Divine Mother Durga Maa who held my hand," stressed Baal. "As she was taking me away, I heard someone call me, and I told the Mother I heard someone calling my name. She turned to me, shook her head, and let go of my hand, and that is why I am still here today."

Durga Maa is a major Hindu goddess, worshipped as a principal aspect of the mother goddess Mahadevi. She is associated with protection, strength, motherhood, destruction, and wars.

"The experience has encouraged me to change my life," said Baal. "I try to do everything in the way how everyone should live their life. But everyone who knows me from the past is aware that I always try to do the right thing. Although, like every human being, I would get vex with my children, I do so to ensure that they don't go on the wrong path. I have my Mandir at home, where my family and I conduct prayers daily. I am very proud of my wife Savi, daughters Anardi and Anuja, and sons Avinash and Akash, because they are there in everything I do."

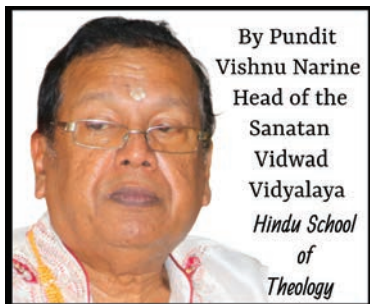
Baal celebrated his 50th birthday and 25th wedding anniversary, recently, with a three-night Bhakti Gyan Yagna, officiated by Pundit Narad Gosine.

He revealed: "After hosting Ganesh Utsav for a few years, we always held Yagnas and always paid for a murti. However, because of a vision in my head, I had my son get a picture of Lord Ganesh, and I was inspired, with his guidance, to start building murtis for myself, family members, and other Mandirs.

"I find joy in doing things with my hands. It's a challenge, but people from various temples started to order murtis for their celebrations. I do not charge. Whatever is offered is fine with me. I am vegetarian. I fast or if a penance is needed I do it before building a murti. I believe it's all about how you worship God."

THE HINDU VIEWPOINT

FINITE FORMS OF THE INFINITE



By Pundit
Vishnu Narine
Head of the
Sanatan
Vidwad
Vidyalyaya
Hindu School
of
Theology

In Hindu concept, the Supreme projects Himself into finite forms and therein lies the explanation that there is but one God in Sanatan Dharma. In order that one may better conceptualise the Infinite, that individual acquaints himself/herself with these projections known as Amsas.

For starters, it is recommended that one who embraces Hinduism ought to focus on the following five Deities – Shree Ganesh, Bhagwaan Shiva, Durgaa Maataa, Bhagwaan Vishnu (the

Sustainer) and Surya Dev. These are known as the Panch Loka Deities.

SHREE GANESH

Shree Ganesh represents the knowledge base of the Infinite. He drives the quest for deepening of knowledge in human beings. The symbolism depicting Him as bearing the head of the white elephant, known for its retentive powers, reflects that memory is an integral part of a sound knowledge foundation.

The head of Ganesh Bhagwaan carries, too, a pronounced trunk (nose). Metaphorically speaking, one's character is sometimes likened to the nose. In this regard, Shree Ganesh is that finite form of God whose blessings restore character that has been tarnished. Regardless of how knowledgeable a person is, that individual has to display an exemplary character in order for

the knowledge to have a positive impact on others.

BHAGWAAN SHIVA

Examining another of the aforementioned five Deities, Bhagwaan Shiva, one gets a glimpse of the dissolving power of the Infinite. Many times the spotlight highlights solely the role of Shivaji at the point when a round of Creation ends. However, His dissolving prowess occurs many times over whenever we have faltered and taken refuge at His feet. Just as contaminated sugar undergoes a process of purification by distilling, in a like manner He filters our misdeeds and sets us on track with a new pathway.

DURGAA MAATAA

The Cosmic Energy of the Infinite is projected in the world as Durgaa Maataa. She is the spouse of Bhagwaan Shiva and prevails over the balance of energy in all its forms. This feature affords the world a degree of comfort and

advancement as we harness these energies in a meaningful way. When we do not manage energy flow, we allow a space for counterproductive practices like lack of control of our carbon footprint which leads to global warming.

Durgaa Maataa's portfolio is also demonstrated as Protector of devotees. In the history of the world, She has repeatedly rescued the pious from the clutches of the Raakshasas (evil perpetrators), for example, Shumbha and Nishumbha.

BHAGWAAN VISHNU

In Hindu mapping, there are many worlds, each with its own Creator (Brahmaaji), Sustainer (Vishnuji) and Dissolver (Shivaji). It is this Bhagwaan Vishnu who is given honour among the five projections being discussed. To every morsel of food that we consume; every garment that we don; every roof under which we rest, Bhagwaan Vishnu is the

acknowledged Provider. His relevance in our daily lives needs no detailed elaboration.

SURYA DEV

Surya Dev (the God of the Sun) is directly responsible for the existence of both animals and plants. His position of worship is therefore firmly etched in the devotee's mind. Additionally, He is the Head of the Grahas (Dispensers of our actions – Karma) and in this role, He has a major input in providing redress for our transgressions in this life and even before our advent into the world.

In addition, the beginner complements his/her worship with Shree Hanumaan and the two major incarnations of the Supreme (Shree Raam and Shree Krishna) along with their spouses (Shree Seetaa and Shree Raadhaa). Protocol also requires one to pay obeisance to Saraswati Maataa, Guru and Ishta (Guardian Angel).

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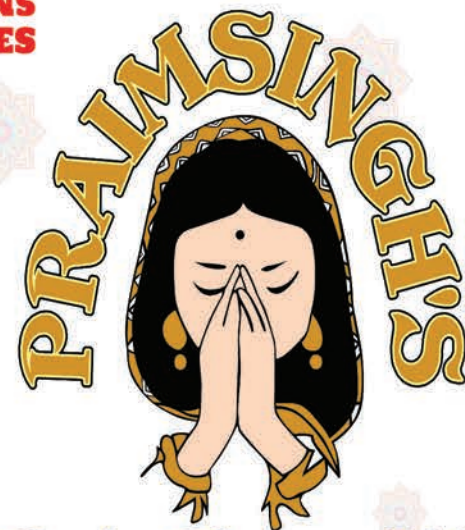


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KLASSY FOR LIFE

Story by Krishna Maharaj

His name is Calvin Ram-sawack, but he is better known as Klassy, a singer/songwriter who began his music career back in 2006.

That was the year he joined the band X-TRILL as its lead singer, performing soca, reggae, hip-hop, alternative pop, and chutney music. Two years later, Klassy decided he wanted to pursue a music career among the soca fraternity, and entered a competition called Soca Star, hosted by local television station, Synergy TV.

After reaching the semi-final round in the contest he was contacted by the chutney/soca band Divya, led by radio personality Kavita Maharaj, to join the aggregation. There he continued to perform his selections, in addition to a few local songs.

"The opportunity gave me a lot of exposure in the entertainment industry, and allowed the public to understand my style and interpretation of music, which they did through performances at weddings, parties, private events, and local concerts," he said.

After spending almost four successful years with the band, Klassy released his first original soca selection titled "Boatride," written by Jason "Shaft" Bishop, one of the top soca song writers. The song created a buzz in the industry, allowing him to link up with popular soca artiste, Dev. They teamed up in 2011 and released a track titled "Drink-ing Padna", which went viral, world-wide.

"This was the song that allowed me to gain mass exposure and traction in the music industry," said Klassy. "To date, the song stands as a legendary one, as it continues to create exhilaration when played."

At that stage of his musical career, Klassy continued to build and strengthen his collective abilities, and decided to obtain certifications in both radio broadcasting and DJ-ing. He completed both courses, with distinctions, at Studio Media 001 Academy Ltd, led by Richard Balgobin aka "Madman Richard."

It was not long after completion of these courses that Klassy signed up for a competition held on 96.1 WEFM titled "Coke Zero DJ Intercol," that

allowed an opportunity for a DJ and Radio Broadcaster to land a spot on the popular radio station.

After entering, he managed to ace every stage of the eight-week competition, against many other talented competitors, and eventually won, being named the top announcer.

He was granted a program of his own alongside the DJ that also topped the competition, "DJ Chad." They both became a part of the 96.1 WEFM team and created a lot of public interest with their dynamic style and presentation.

His term with the station ended in 2016. However, soon after he joined Lime Radio 101.7 where he worked as a radio personality as well for a couple years.

During his career Klassy transitioned to other popular local bands, inclusive of Sally Sagram and Xtreme, The Fusion Band led by Rick Ramoutar and Sexy Vanessa, as well as being among the founding members of Rikki Jai and Jaimasterz, led by Rikki Jai.

"These experiences allowed me to further showcase my talent and versatility in the music industry," he said. "While I made a conscious decision to disconnect from the band life and venture on my own as an independent artist, I still do some part-time work with Avatar The Band, led by Wizzy; a maestro keyboardist in the chutney soca fraternity."

Klassy continues to launch songs annually, through music videos, and enjoys working with various producers and experts in the industry. His musical journey has afforded him the opportunity to perform extensively, more so locally, as well as internationally.

After taking a couple years after the pandemic to reboot and rebrand himself, he is back in action with the launch of his latest contribution titled "Want Tuh Know."

Klassy does not want to be branded or boxed into any genre, but aims to give long-lasting, good-sounding, feel-good music to the world. Songs that will last not only for a season but for decades.

His mission statements are: "Often Imitated, Never Duplicated" and "K4L - Klassy4Life".



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PUNDIT RANDY'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Photos by Kavita Ramcharitar



Pundit Randy Ragbir recently celebrated his birthday with prayers at his home on Rochard Douglas Road, Barrackpore. Pundit Lakshmidath Persad officiated at the event.

CONTRIBUTORS

THE INFOCUS TEAM ☎ 367-3430 / 780-9978



KRISHNA MAHARAJ
GENERAL
MANAGER/
PHOTO EDITOR



KAVITA RAMCHARITAR
SENIOR PHOTO
JOURNALIST/
PHOTO EDITOR



DAVID CUFFY
JOURNALIST/
EDITOR



RAYMOND AARON
PHOTO JOURNALIST/
POINT FORTIN
CORRESPONDENT



WESS STUDIOS
CREATIVE
DIRECTOR



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Trinidad and Tobago does not have a good track record when it comes to preserving sites and structures of heritage significance.

A visit to the Lopinot Historical Complex is further proof of that failing. One will notice that the structure is in total ruin. The Lopinot House was built in 1806, and is one of the few remaining structures from La Reconnnaissance Estate. The area is still open to the public. However, there are not any historical artifacts present on site to educate the younger generation.

Folklore has it that if you found yourself at Lopinot on a rainy night, you might come face-to-face with the ghost of Charles Joseph de Loppinot de la Fresilliere – a French Count who came to Trinidad in 1800 – as he roamed about his estate house located in the northern village named after him. In 1806, Loppinot was granted 478 acres of land by the King

of England, and planted cocoa on the scenic area of agricultural land which he called La Reconnnaissance.

The restored estate house was made into a small museum which displayed some Amerindians artifacts. There was a recreational park and a savannah located to the north of the museum. Carat sheds were located along the river, especially for the picnickers who liked to wade or even bathe in the cold water. Picnic benches and tables were also available for those who preferred shady trees and dry ground.

Lopinot Tourism Association Ltd. was launched in 2014 to create livelihoods and economic opportunities for members of the Lopinot community through sustainable development initiatives in heritage culture, eco-tourism, agri-projects, eco-jewelry and fashion. Important to its purpose was the protection of the environment and preservation of

LOPINOT NEEDS TO BE SAVED

RESTORE THIS LANDMARK

Lopinot's cultural heritage.

The Association offered cultural and educational tours for the general public and students which provided incomes for young people and sales for farmers' produce of cocoa and coffee. It also facilitated a market for the hand-made jewelry, tie-dye clothes, basket weaving, soaps and other products made by women artists and artisans in Lopinot.

Training was an important part of the Association's agenda. Members of the community were taught to make chocolates which were marketed through the Lopinot Chocolates Company. The community also benefited from training

related to rain-water harvesting under a project conducted by NIHERST, and in water-testing and water management under WASA's Adopt-a-River Programme.

One of its important successes was the construction of six agricultural access roads which was achieved in collaboration with the farmers' association. The Association also acted as a guardian of the natural environment, organising mass planting of trees, protecting the water reserve, monitoring the area for bush fires, and reporting incidents of slash-and-burn farming.

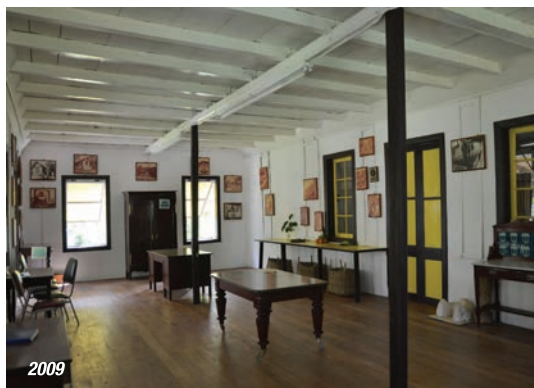
Over the years, many of our historic buildings have been

allowed to deteriorate and disappear. Therefore, we are urging the present administration to restore this landmark so that the younger generation can be educated about the rich history of Lopinot. As a result of this abandonment of the Historical Complex, parang has deteriorated within the Lopinot village. No longer do we see the house-to-house parang, nor do we hear the traditional parang music around Christmas time.

It's not too late to restore our traditional culture of parang as in the years gone by. Much is needed to restore Lopinot to the place it once was – the parang capital of Trinidad.

Story
&
Photos
by
Davy Gopaul
Chief
Photographer

Photos in 2009 by Photo Editor/Manager
Krishna Maharaj
Photos in 2024 by Chief Photographer
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"THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY PENSION PLANNING IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO"



In the ever-changing landscape of financial planning, one aspect that demands our attention is pension planning. As a Financial Advisor and Insurance Agent in Trinidad and Tobago, I am keenly aware of the shifting dynamics surrounding retirement, particularly the potential increase in the retirement age to receive pension benefits from the National Insurance Board (NIB). In this article, we will explore the benefits of early pension planning and how it can play a crucial role in securing a comfortable retirement.

Trinidad and Tobago's National Insurance System has been a cornerstone in providing financial support to individuals during their retirement years. However, with the global trend of an aging population and increas-

ing life expectancy, governments are contemplating adjustments to retirement age to ensure the sustainability of pension programs. While these discussions are ongoing, one thing is clear: early pension planning has never been more vital.

One of the primary advantages of early pension planning is the power of compounding. By starting to contribute to your pension fund at an early age, you give your investments more time to grow. The compounding effect allows your money to earn interest on both the principal amount and the accumulated interest, resulting in exponential growth over the long term. This can significantly enhance the overall value of your pension fund, providing you with a more substantial financial cushion when you retire.

Moreover, early pension planning allows individuals to take advantage of tax incentives and some employer-sponsored retirement plans. In Trinidad and Tobago, contributions to approved pension plans qualify for tax deductions, reducing your taxable income. Employers often offer

retirement savings programs, contributing to your pension fund alongside your own contributions. By tapping into these opportunities early on, you can maximize the benefits and boost your retirement savings.

The prospect of an increased retirement age adds another layer of urgency to early pension planning. As governments worldwide grapple with the economic implications of longer life expectancies, adjustments to retirement ages are being considered to ensure the sustainability of pension systems. By planning for retirement early, individuals can potentially mitigate the impact of a higher retirement age. Early planners may be better positioned to retire when they choose, rather than being compelled to work longer due to changes in pension eligibility.

Furthermore, early pension planning fosters a disciplined savings habit. It encourages individuals to create a budget, allocate a portion of their income towards retirement savings, and make informed investment deci-

sions. Cultivating financial discipline early in life is instrumental in achieving long-term financial goals, including a comfortable retirement.

In conclusion, the benefits of early pension planning are manifold, especially in the face of potential changes to the retirement age for receiving pension benefits. By starting early, individuals can harness the power of compounding, take advantage of tax incentives and employer-sponsored

plans, and build a robust financial foundation for retirement. Early pension planning not only secures your financial future but also empowers you to navigate potential changes in the retirement landscape with confidence and peace of mind. As the saying goes, "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second-best time is now." The same holds true for pension planning – the earlier you start, the brighter your retirement future will be.



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PRAIMSINGH'S DAUGHTER VOWS TO CONTINUE FATHER'S LEGACY IN SERVICE TO CULTURE

"My father did all that he did out of love"

Story and Photo by Kavita Ramcharitar

Continuing someone's legacy typically involves carrying on their work, values, and impact after they are no longer able to do so themselves.

It can include upholding their beliefs, completing unfinished projects, or furthering causes that were important to them. It's a way of honouring and preserving the influence and contributions of the person who came before, ensuring that their efforts and impact endure beyond their lifetime.

Savitree Praisingsh, daughter of the late Ajeet Praisingsh, has vowed to continue the work of her father, paying particular attention to the Mere Desh (My Country) Committee which he founded in 1991.

"When he got sick in 2014, he asked me to take it over," she recalled. "My sisters and I, along with other workers, started doing it in 2015, but with children, not adults. The idea of Mere Desh came about when he attended several Arrival Day re-enactments that emphasized the whipping and hardships that indentured labourers had to endure. The Committee has commemorated Indian Arrival Day, and branded it as Recognition Day since then."

Some of its activities include Local Classical Singing Competition focusing on the teachings of Sant Kabir, Paratha Roti Competition, Agri Expo Workshop in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Your Health is in Your Hands (free medical examination), Music Workshop (teaching the public to play various East Indian Musical Instruments), and a Junior Tassa Group Competition.

Indian music and serving culture were Praisingsh's first love. He was honoured for long and meritorious service in the fields of culture, religion, business, social and community activism. Popularly known as the 'Indian Connection,' he was involved in various facets of Indian culture, competitions for Biraha, Tassarama, Mike-O-Rama, and PRO of the television show, Tarana. He was also a founding member of the Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago. He documented cultural history, with an impressive photographic collection of local and foreign Indian artistes.

He had been the record producer for over 30 artistes – ranging from devotional songs

to the chutney genre – under the "Praisingsh Presents" recording label. In February 2005 he took a group of local folk singers known as the D'Bhuyaa Saaj on a tour to India, performing in seven cities. He was the director of Cross-Country Parade of Local Talent, a 25-series radio programme discovering and showcasing local talent, visiting various villages throughout the country.

Ajeet Praisingsh was born on the 18th November 1953 to the late Popo and Padum Praisingsh in St. Augustine, Curepe. His first job was riding his bicycle delivering newspapers throughout the village. The job initiated and sparked his passion for serving his community. After his role as a newspaper boy, he served as a postman, and also became more passionate about serving his community on a larger scale.

His grandfather, Babu Praisingsh, (1890–1956) was the creator of the first Pooja store in Trinidad named Praisingsh's Pooja Bhavan Limited, an 'all in one' pooja and music shop, selling all pooja materials, books, recording items and magazines on Watts Street, Curepe. Ajeet became the owner in 1979. His love for his rich indigenous culture reflected in the way he conducted business. He prepared hand-outs for every religious occasion, free of charge to all his customers.

He implemented a religious seasonal section for his stores in which he displayed books, murties and all the materials needed for the next upcoming season. His ideas for readily packaged pooja bags, hawan packs and dhar packs made worship preparation stress-free. His innovations were efficient, original and a benchmark for other pooja stores to follow, as these features are now common to pooja stores nationwide.

For his contributions to culture and nation-building Praisingsh received numerous awards that included the Humming Bird (Silver) Medal, Chaguanas Borough Corporation–The Mayor Award, Hindi Nidhi Award, National Chutney Foundation and National Cultural Promotion Award, Indian Classical Singers and Drummers Association Award, Gopio Trinidad and Tobago Award, Gayelle –Pierrot Award, 103 FM's Hall of Fame Recognition Award.

His religious contributions included: Four days project on Sant Kabir Dass Venue Freeport, Five-days lectures on the Teaching

and Philosophy of Sant Kabir, a Kabir Bhajan–mala –Songs and Praises to Sant Kabir, and T&T Kabir Panth Reunion and Family and Sports Day.

"My father did all that he did out of love," said Savitree. "We will continue to do what we have to do out of the love we will always have for our father."



Savitree Praisingsh shows the CD's her father produced for chutney artists.



Ajeet Praisingsh



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POINT FORTIN THE BIRTHPLACE OF CALYPSONIANS

By David Cuffy (Editor)

Point Fortin is the smallest Borough in Trinidad and Tobago. It is located in southwestern Trinidad, southwest of San Fernando, in the county of Saint Patrick.

However, despite its small size, the town has the reputation of being the birthplace of several of this country's most decorated calypsonians. Among whom are:

Mighty Duke, the late Kelvin Pope, who had the distinction of winning the National Calypso Monarch title four years in a row – 1968–1971.

SuperBlue (Austin Lyons), a five-times Calypso Monarch finalist, Road March champion on nine occa-

sions, and Soca Monarch champion seven times.

Fay Ann Lyons/Alvarez, SuperBlue's daughter, a three-time Road March champion (2003, 2008, 2009) and the 2009 International Soca Monarch, and International Groovy Soca Monarch champion.

Preacher (Barnett Henry), winner of the Road March title in 1994.

Neil "Iwer" George, shared the Road March title with SuperBlue in 2000.

Wayne T (Winston Thomas) – best known for the 1993 hit song "Doye Doye," a collaboration with his brother Roger Thomas aka Silky Slim.

Naya George, best known

for his 2002 Road March contender "Trinidad."

Luta (Morel Peters), shared the Calypso Monarch title with Delamo (Franz Lambkin) in 1994, and won it on his own in 2006.

Cro Cro (Weston Rawlins) won the Calypso Monarch title on four occasions (1988, 1990, 1996, and 2007).

Connector (Joel Davis), based in Canada. He was the first artiste to win the Soca Monarch and Road March titles in Toronto in the same year – 2005.

However, calypsonians are not the only artistes who have contributed to making Point Fortin the cradle from which spawn the nation's

cultural heroes. In addition, the Borough is home to the Jeunes Agape Choir, led by Loyce Lewis. In 1995 the group won the Trinidad and Tobago Song Festival, and over time has been adjudged Best Gospel Choir (2004, 2006), Best Folk Choir (1995, 1997, 1999, 2002), Most Outstanding Folk Choir (1997, 1999, 2002, 2006), and Best Calypso Chorale (1999, 2002, 2004, 2006).

After the discovery of petroleum in the area in 1906, "Point," as it is affectionately referred to, grew into a major oil-producing centre, growing with the oil industry between the 1940s and 1980s, culminating in its elevation to Borough status in 1980.



Super Blue



Fay Ann Lyons

THE ORIGINAL
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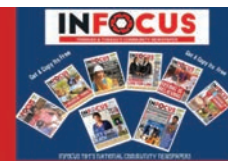
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TRAYAMBAKESHWAR MAHADEV MANDIR CELEBRATES WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD THE RETURN OF LORD RAMA FROM EXILE

Hindus around the world celebrated a major historic milestone on January 22 – the consecration of the Ram Lalaa at the Sri Rama Janmabhoomi (Rama's birthplace) Mandir in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India.

The festival of lights, Diwali, based on scripture, is commemorated to mark Sri Rama's return to Ayodhya with his consort, Sita, and his brother Lakshman after his exile of 14 years,

and upon defeating the King of Lanka, Ravana.

Locally, Pundit Satyanand Mahabir Dubey and his devotees observed the occasion at the Trayambakeshwar Mahadev Mandir on Caroni Savannah Road, Chaguanas. The historical significance was marked by the lighting of deyas, and the celebration was branded as World Diwali. As well, it marked, once more, the installation of Shree Ram Murti at the revered site.



Photos Rehanna Ramsaran (Vision 2 Photo & Video Production)



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PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR INNOVATION IN EAST PORT-OF-SPAIN

"CARIRI meets the needs of society"

Story by Krishna Maharaj

The East Port of Spain Development Company Ltd (EPOS) has partnered with the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI) to deliver a range of innovative programmes to residents of East Port of Spain.

EPOS has been working to develop the human capital in East Port of Spain communities, by partnering with various institutions and individuals to offer educational opportunities to residents, who may not have traditional academic qualifications.

EPOS' programmes offer participants an opportunity to become trained, certified, employable, and able to create employment for themselves and others. Its latest partnership with CARIRI will see a suite of programmes rolled out to East Port of Spain residents during the current financial year.

The partnership was formalised during a signing ceremony held at the Highlanders Pan Theatre and Learning Centre in Laventille on December 14, 2023.

Speaking at the ceremony, Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant Adrian Leonce, hailed the partnership as "planting the seeds for innovation in East Port of Spain communities."

He noted that the programmes offered by CARIRI surround Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

(STEM) fields which he called the jobs of the future.

"Keeping Trinidad and Tobago at the cutting edge of technology and innovation is what is going to ensure a steady stream of good jobs into the 21st century," he said. "And that's why we are here today – to take new action to put East Port-of-Spain at the forefront of the 21st century."

Noting that the steelpan was born out of East Port of Spain, Leonce expressed confidence that the next great innovative invention in Trinidad and Tobago will also come out of East Port of Spain.

Chief Executive Officer of CARIRI Hans Erich-Schulz, in delivering remarks, stressed that the programmes offered by the organisation were designed to meet the needs of society.

"Our goal is not only to transfer knowledge but to empower individuals and communities with a conscious mindset, presenting alternative employment opportunities," he said. "We envision creating a cadre of trained individuals who are not only knowledgeable, but are also motivated agents of change within the East Port of Spain communities. By fostering critical thinking, and exposing participants to the latest advancements in each field, we aim to spark excitement and motivation for positive change."

Interested persons can visit EPOS' Facebook page for information on the programmes being offered and how to register. Registration is now open.



EPOS Managing Director Dr Deborah Thomas-Austin and CARIRI CEO Hans Erich Schulz sign a partnership agreement for the implementation of several training programmes for residents of East Port of Spain.



From left to right – Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and MP for Laventille East/Morvant Adrian Leonce; EPOS Managing Director Dr Deborah Thomas-Austin; CARIRI CEO Hans Erich Schulz and Keshore Lutchman, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Planning and Development.



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For Distribution: Manager of Rocks Fashions Rakesh Rahaman received another shipment of Infocus Newspaper at his store on Lefferts Boulevard, Queens New York from Pamela Ramlogan. Photo Steve Ramlogan

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY FIELD TRIP AT WILD FOWL TRUST POINTE-A-PIERRE



Photo By Krishna Maharaj

In photo from left, Anya Schulz, her dad Hans— Erich Schulz (Chief Executive Officer of CARIRI) Ariella Lomash, Esther Herrera, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Rehanna Ramsaran (Engineering student UWI) Kavita Ramcharitar (assistant lecturer) Sharon Sookdeo –Jaglal (school teacher) and Althea Martinez (Director of A.S.M. Financial and Insurance Services Limited Financial adviser)

BABY & RAMROOP SAY "THANK YOU"

Photos Kavita Ramcharitar



Baby and Ramroop of Poole Valley Road, Rio Claro hosted an evening of appreciation and thanks for those who helped with the recent staging of a seven-nights yagna (prayers). Invitees were treated to eats, drinks and presented with gifts for their contributions to the event.



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KAYDON: YOUNG KING IN THE MAKING

By Krishna Maharaj | Photo by Zahir Mohammed

Ten-year-old Kaydon Hart, a student of Chaguanas Government Primary School, was crowned Road March Champion 2024 at the Eastern Credit Union's 32nd Annual Primary School Calypso Showcase, staged on Thursday, February 1.

When he was just five years old, Kaydon won his first calypso competition at school. He continued his winning streak in 2023 in the same competition, after two years without competition due to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

Under the guidance of Reverend Zahir Mohammed, as his coach and manager,

the youngster has performed, over the years, in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation Junior Calypso Showcase, at Crimson Lights Cafe, Thanksgivings, and The Flaming Word Cathedral.

Kaydon is adamant about becoming the next Junior Soca Monarch of Trinidad and Tobago. With the Flaming Word Cathedral and Dr. Dave Alleyne as his spiritual mentor in his corner, along with his loving family, Kaydon's future looks bright and promising. He makes a huge impact wherever he goes with his loving personality and winning smile. Keep your eyes on this Young King in the making.





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PUSHING PAN

Photos by Kerwin Pierre



THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR CARNIVAL

TRINIDAD CARNIVAL IS REALLY NOT ALL CALLOUS DISDAIN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

By David Cuffy (Editor)

Carnival is an exhibitionist's dream, so the tendency to record every event from a voyeuristic perspective seems normal. But instead of providing a balanced picture, that approach has served to harm the festival instead. Over the years, it has become clear that the selection of images used in print and television was not accurately describing the larger picture. For openers, we tend to show our women as little else but a group of wanton winners and wavers.

Regardless of their inherent beauty and poise, ladies who dance demurely at fetes seldom attract the cameras, and even among the very winners and wavers, those who didn't show the required amount of cleavage or rear end ran the risk of being disregarded altogether. From the images, though, we are left to conclude that an overwhelming percentage of the women who go to fetes, invariably become drunk and consequently engage in the most lewd displays.

But this is simply not true. One picture of two extroverted females in a fete that might have attracted three or four thousand women overall, is hardly evidence that the entire gender has opted for indecent exposure as a way of

enjoying the Carnival. The consumer then extracts from the single picture or camera angle to construct an image of the entire fete, coming up with a misguided opinion of what is happening there, resulting in unfair branding of the festival.

Now, it's not that I have only run into cloistered nuns at the all-inclusive parties and fetes, nor do priests and monks frequent loud soca jams. But neither did any of those fetes I used to attend feature vulgarity exclusively, or offer incentives to the bravely dressed. But in addition to that basic premise, the very Carnival itself has been forced to endure an equally unflattering spin in the eyes of the media.

The coming of television has not helped, and radio has given soca a bad name. At the first hint of a skirmish between what could be as little as .0002 of the patronage of a fete, the media rushes to editorialise about "Carnival Violence" and hastens to interview the police commissioner. A single tasteless calypso pushes even government officials to public remonstrance.

But there are decent participants, good calypso and sweet pan, highly creative and artistic

experiences, management models and significant social and economic activities going on in the Carnival too. On the aesthetic level, there are spectacularly beautiful moments. If only the cameras were to capture them, then mix those images with the preferred wining shots, we might just come up with a more rounded view of the festival.

One such moment, which has been elevated to the top of my lifetime list of Most Memorable Carnival Scenes, was a chip on Monday morning down the paved surface west of the Queen's Park Savannah stage. It featured hundreds of people dancing their way into Jouvert, some even holding their partners in conventional ballroom fashion, all blessed by a light drizzle and swaying to the music of a single-pan band. Mark you, it occurred right where all the cameras were. But those images have never been reproduced anywhere, perhaps because they held no sexual value, or were unlikely to trigger controversy.

It is no wonder then that the festival's overall value, having been measured only by the number of wining images delivered by the media to armchair commentators, results in a view

that Carnival's only area of steady growth is in its rate of descent into wanton immorality. We are led to believe that the festival has no identifiable saving graces. But Carnival continues to produce a number of valuable products. The festival has helped in no small way to bridge class and ethnic gaps in the society, while presenting our best-known export product to the global marketplace and creating industry. It has reportedly generated up to \$300 million in increased economic activity at the domestic level. And although the real impact on the national psyche may only be

appreciated in its absence, Carnival is generally agreed as a kind of pressure-valve that helps to keep possible civil turbulence in check.

So, Trinidad Carnival is really not all callous disdain for the environment, a parade of Las Vegas streetwalkers, runaway recklessness, tasteless calypsoes, and wanton immorality. But those who have the responsibility to deliver that larger body of information to the public must first believe it.



Chanka Seeteram and Wife



Helen Humphrey

PHOTOS FROM THE ARCHIVES OF KRISHNA MAHARAJ



Rangy & Sarah Dolsingh



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YOUTHS NEEDED TO HELP DEVELOP THE COCOA SECTOR

Story and Photos Kavita Ramchaaritar

Gewan Gangaram is a cocoa bean farmer from Eccles Ville, Rio Claro who believes that despite the fact that many cocoa farmers work extremely hard, under gruelling conditions, yet do not earn a decent income, measures should still be taken to encourage young people to get back into the cocoa fields.

"I have made huge inroads in terms of finding high-end markets for the exporting of our cocoa beans," he said. "The beans I have produced have reached globally, because I have worked with Meridian Cocoa Company, a cocoa bean distributor based in Portland, Oregon in the USA, which buys a substantial amount in beans from me, and sells it abroad."

Cocoa beans farming requires high rainfall and temperatures to grow, as well as rainforest trees to offer shade and protection from too much light and damage caused by wind. Because cocoa farms are sensitive to this type of climate, they can only flourish in a narrow band of countries between 20 degrees north and south of the equator.

Gewan revealed that the process begins with fermentation of fresh pulpy quality beans, white in color, which are turned every 48 hours during a six or seven-day period before they are taken out and placed for drying.

Heat is very critical during fermentation with a temperature up to 50 degrees Celsius, he added. When a bean is fermented its color is brown. It is then washed, put to dry, then placed in a plastic bag.

"Me and my brothers and sisters grew up in cocoa fields with

our parents," he said, "and evenings after school we would go out and assist them, and practice the way how everything was done."

He recalled that the Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited was established with a mission "to empower stakeholders by leading and facilitating the development of the cocoa sector in an efficient, innovative, and transparent manner to increase production whilst ensuring adherence to international standards of quality, leading to improved value and a globally recognized brand."

"In 2017 when the Association closed down, I was heavily involved in the estate," he stated. "The closure caused farmers having to go out and market their own stuff, and at that time it was difficult for them because they were accustomed selling their produce to a buying agent in the district. The government also was not providing funding and the farmers had to finance their own operations. That caused many problems because they were only able to finance to a certain point.

At that time, I was fortunate to have met Kamaldeo Maraj, who was working for a fellow called Dwayne Dove of the Tobago Cocoa Estate, and from them I learnt about fermentation and proper procedures.

I then extended the offer to the community because my parents were farmers. Because they were underpaid, I also extended the offer to the farmers and the neighbors in the village in an effort to try and get a better price for their beans. If I was successful, they would benefit, and

be able to enjoy a higher standard of living. That was my sole purpose for doing it. Because I think not only for me and my family but for the people of the village, because most of us depend on agriculture and the cocoa estate.

Locally there are companies like Cocoa Bell, Cocoa Republic, and others here in Trinidad that bought beans from me. Last year I had a contract with Island Chocolate to supply 20 metric tons, but because of weather changes, I was not able to fulfill that contract. One of the challenges we have presently is a change in weather patterns, resulting in too much rain. That is why we have low production for the past couple years, and it can be a downfall for the industry. The future for the production of cocoa bean is that that if the weather pattern doesn't change it will have a serious impact on the production in the cocoa industry. Another problem is that because cocoa is labor intensive people are moving away from it. Very few young people are going into agriculture and cocoa because of the lifestyle. I assume they want an easier way to do things. This area in Eccles Ville, Rio Claro, Becher was a huge catchment for cocoa but people don't want to work hard again, they want everything easy."

Cocoa, Gewan pointed out, is a viable source of foreign exchange. But the "unavailability to process" enough for export is affecting him negatively.

produce, and I had to cancel a contract to produce 20 tons of cocoa for export, as I was only able to produce 4 metric tons, which my agent had to sell right here, locally."

Gewan said he continues to educate people on the benefits of cocoa production, but there is also the need to learn how to deal with

the weather changes.

"Cocoa is a really important industry because right now it is considered like gold," he stressed. "The demand has heightened, and if we get a dry season, we would be able to regularize. My aim right now is to try and encourage young people to go back into cocoa."



Gewan Gangaram left and his sister Doolari Ramdath.



Doolari Ramdath spreads the cocoa beans for drying.

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