

Woman's Extra

Fruit for thought

I'VE got fruit on my mind, especially peaches. And plums, cherries, pears, apples, the fruits of the season. Dear God, thank you for such pretty fruit, just looking at them on a gloomy monsoon day cheers up the senses! We're finally having what I call real monsoon days, thick, silvery-grey days, with a constant pitter-patter of rain, trees washed clean and green, a pair of pert tailor birds flirt amongst the coconut tree fronds outside the balcony of my room.

They break up my melancholy dawn reverie with their insistent *towit, towit, towit*, some say it is *do-it, do-it, do-it*. Do what? I asked the pair of birds. Draw my money out of the bank and catch the next train out of Mumbai, go and pray at some ancient temple of wood and stone in the Garhwal Himalayas, go to Badrinath, Hemkund, the Valley of Flowers. Well, I am working on it.

In the meantime, the monsoon is my favourite season and I'm wondering why I ever endorsed it here as a "season of grief"? Season of grief? Good grief, perish the thought. The monsoon can never be a season of grief. It is essentially a season of growth or growing-up if you like, rejuvenation, regeneration. Of nostalgia, maybe. But above all I think the monsoon is the perfect season of healing.

See, how it heals a wounded earth, so fed-up of the sins of greed and stupidity of human beings. It also inspires emotions of forgiveness and healing in the human heart. Don't tell me such profound thoughts make a confirmed philosopher of me. Whatever, if you're asking me, I'm convinced of all qualities to cultivate in life the hardest, the most important to cultivate, is — forgiveness. For unless you forgive how can you forget? And unless you forget, how can you be happy again?

On that note let's move on to the temperate fruit of the season or what we Indians call the English fruit. Probably because although we have our own range of *desi* temperate fruit growing in the wild, the cultivated varieties were introduced by the British. I swear no other

you like to throw a stone at me? Here, take all that's left of my peach...

For Lawrence, eating a peach was an exercise in sensual discovery, educating his poetic sensibility — he equated eating a peach (or fig) with making love, if you know what I mean. After he'd savoured the luscious sweetness of the peach he studied the leftover peach stone... *wrinkled with secrets! And hard with the intention to keep them.* Life's like that, like eating a peach — only, beware of its heart of stone!

But to go on, the peach, together with the plum, apricot, cherry and almond, is called a drupe fruit of the Rosaceae family. The apple and pear are the pome fruits of the same family. But never mind the fine definitions. I'm not surprised to learn that the peach needs the warmest climate amongst all the temperate fruit, it is almost a sub-tropical fruit and can be cultivated with considerable success in several Indian states but it is not, a pity. I remember peach trees in the Kulu and Kashmir valleys, they're elegant trees which fan out... alas, I haven't yet seen a peach tree in bloom, or in fruit. I reckon to see an almond or peach tree in bloom would be pure, unadulterated pleasure. In Kashmir, the almond tree is the first tree of spring to bloom...

I used to think the peach a Mediterranean fruit, but a little reading later reveals that it is actually a native of the Orient, of China in particular, where it has been cultivated



ON MY OWN
BY TARA PATEL

Greek physicians also prescribed the peach as a cleansing fruit — eat a peach a day and your digestive system will always be in the pink of health, it will also make your complexion glow.

The Mediterranean countries took to the peach in a big way. A few peach plants were introduced to England by an Italian monk called Wolf, he was gardener to King Henry VIII, if you please. The English too took a great fancy to the peach and so we have these wonderful phrases... "she has a peaches and cream complexion". One of these days I will go on a diet of peaches to get a peachy complexion in my old age! When somebody makes you happy you say he is a real peachy person!

I went shopping with my aunt in Chembur — she is a real peach! — on Sunday evening, and bought peaches for Rs. 24 kg, about 10-12 medium-sized fruit, and they are absolutely peachy in taste. This is what I like about shopping in middle-class suburban markets, the fruiterers here don't cheat on the scales and prices are more honest. Peaches need careful washing though, remember. You know the use of pesticides is a major scandal in this country and because peaches have this soft fuzz all over, they tend to trap whatever is sprayed on more firmly. So wash peaches scrupulously, then savour them at room temperature. Enjoy a peach this season like it deserves to be enjoyed.

Remembering Dr. Salim Ali

THEY were remembering the grand old man of Indian ornithology — Salim Ali (if you haven't read his autobiography *The Fall of A Sparrow* you haven't lived!) — on his fourth death anniversary, at the Bombay Natural History Society, the other day. It was a low-key affair this year. They planted 50 trees in his memory at the BNHS land at Borivali, earmarked for an institute of ornithology. The evening function at BNHS House in the city saw a small audience.

Nevertheless, it was a poignant occasion with a side exhibition of some of the famous bird-man's photographs, books, medals awarded him. BNHS secretary Ulhas Rane made the evening's introductions, saying that Salim Ali's death anniversary should not be experienced as something grim, but "as a day of inspiration". A sentiment which would have won the late ornithologist's approval.

Then BNHS executive member Admiral Awati, BNHS director Robert Grubb, enlightened industrialist Soli Godrej, secretary in the urban development ministry — D.T. Joseph — recounted how their varied dealings with Salim Ali had changed their vision of life. To one

and all his message was: If we are not in tune with nature, life is not worth living.

They recalled how for all his formidable achievements, Salim Ali was an exemplary human being — down-to-earth, humble, modest, with a sense of irreverent humour. But he had a passion for birds, work, perfection... and Admiral Awati may well ask, "How does one pay a tribute to a legend?" He briefly traced how Salim Ali was a self-made, self-educated ornithologist and how till the end, as he breathed his last at Jaslok Hospital, he still remembered his feathered friends.

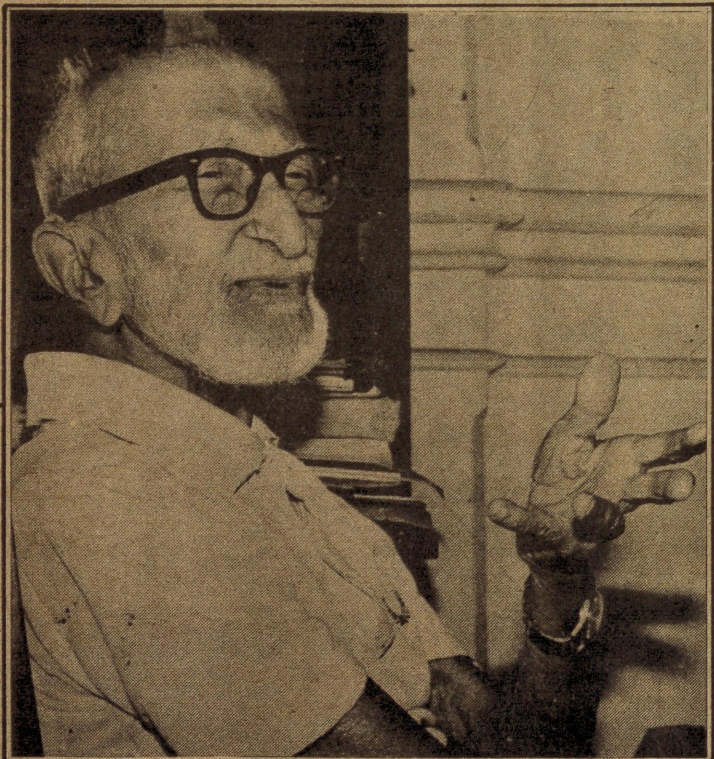
Mr. Godrej too mentioned how one subject had constantly worried

Salim Ali was fond of chocolates, ice-creams and loved company, he was also a raconteur *par excellence*... at home with people from all walks of life. All this and more, God bless Salim Ali. But I dare say, however, that were he alive today he'd be quite distressed to hear of the rumblings of discord at the BNHS.

I'm truly sad to hear that one of the society's senior-most scientists — Dr. Asad Rahmani — has recently resigned. It sounds like hell's bells are ringing at the BNHS. I'm acquainted with Dr. Rahmani and know him to be a painstaking, quiet and distinguished scientist in the field of ecology and conservation. His work on the Great Indian Bustard is by now well-known and he recently initiated a project to save whatever is left of the vast *terai* grasslands of the country.

Why then is he abandoning a project so dear to him? I asked him but he tried to smile and shrugged, refused to say anything for fear of hurting the hitherto pristine reputation of the BNHS! I gather from friends, however, that he's been working under considerable duress in recent years and now he wants out, he is going off to greener pastures in Aligarh. Needless to say his departure will be a loss for the BNHS.

But what I'd like to know is isn't anybody asking any questions about why Dr. Asad Rahmani has resigned? I wish my friends in the fourth estate would take a little more interest in conservation and environment organisations and movements in the country. If only because they now invite a lot of goodwill funds and donations from home and especially big money from abroad!



Stay tuned in with nature, believed Dr. Salim Ali.

group of fruit makes such a beguiling splash of colour in the market these days.

Imagine them — blushing, golden-fleshed peaches, rich, wine-dark reds of plums, lacquered tints of cherries, fresh greens of pears. I always think that a bowl-full of peaches or cherries can brighten up any dismal room.

My favourite is the peach. A couple of peaches can fill a room with their warm, peachy fragrance of summer, and inspire a real peachy high. I've been reading up about the peach, let me educate you! There's something about the fruit of the peach which beguiles the senses more than the other temperate fruit. In one of his famous fruit poems poet D.H. Lawrence asks, *Would*

vated and fussed over for over 2,000 years before the dawn of Christianity. Blossom, fragrance, fruit — the Chinese were connoisseurs of the peach tree and peach trees were a favourite haunt of the sage Confucius. It's said he used to solve people's problems while strolling beneath peach trees in a garden.

When the trade routes opened up, of course, the peach began to go places, it travelled to Rome via Turkestan, north-west India, through Persia... it arrived in Rome during the reign of the emperor Claudius in the first century A.D. The Romans thought it was a fruit from Persia and called it "almond of Persia". But the Greeks, perhaps a more educated lot, dedicated the peach to their goddess of beauty i.e. Venus.

You're invited.



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