

# THE NOUVEAU RICHE

MONEY MAKES the mare go for sure, but in the case of this particular class, the way which it takes is what stands out. No one in his right senses would blame a man for getting rich overnight or even over a couple nights at that. The touch of ostentatiousness that accompanies this flow of wealth, however, marks the man out as one who does know at which end of the stick he is at.

The Gulf boom began in the late sixties, and right till today, whenever there is talk of getting rich - and fast, one inevitably ends up with the suggestion of migrating temporarily to those oil-rich regions. Despite thousands having been duped of their life savings, and quite a good more led into dubious deal, the rush goes on.

In one of our Southern States, it has become some kind of a prestige issue. If one doesn't have at least a close relative in what has to be known (rather affectionately) as "Saudi", then one's chances of gaining any sort of social standing are certainly low.

And on a trip to this State, one can see the hallmark (or should it be plural?) of this wealth. Nay, it stands out, it hits one between the brows and around the face too. You do everything but pass out flat.

The first is that combination of colours used to smear the outer portion of their houses. The rainbow is relegated to a poor second place with a flash of hues that would tax even a street painters imagination.

Inside, a couple of electronic gadgets (available for a song in oil country) can be seen lying, thrown (seemingly) carelessly around the living room. Brightly coloured clothes litter up the bedrooms. That sweaters of the brightest hues are worn during the peak of summer goes without saying.

And this, mind you, is class. Social grace. What it takes to make the echelons of the upper crust. It gives you courage to hold your head up and walk tall.

So the man who can command the largest dowry for his son (the blighter

who is in "Saudi") by virtue of the fact that girl so purchased is indeed fortunate to marry a man of such largesse, can walk on air.

It doesn't stop there. There is a certain amount of differentiation among the countries where their darling offspring are toiling. Those in the not-so-rich lands enable their procreators to be a step higher on the social ladder.

This, of course, means that one can go to the costliest restaurant around (not the best), order chicken a la carte, and eat it using one's hand right up to the elbow. (In certain regions, ever going up to the armpit is not frowned upon.)

If the man has more such class, he can utilise the services of a fork and spoon (a couple of knives too, if he so wishes) and make as much noise over his victuals, as the Eiffel Tower would, were it to collapse.

In another town down south, things have reached such a pass that the man who he owns a Datsun fitted with an air-conditioner will not rub shoulders with who owns merely a Datsun.

And if an outsider happens to enter that Datsun where the air is so special, he would be subjected to the discomfort of having the air he breathes doctored. Even in winter.

Those who acquire their wealth from places further West have their own set of nuances, the first being the accent they either purchase or borrow.

clothes too take a drastic change, with those eminently unsuited to this climate (and those which are in vogue "where we come from" being sported.

This type of "class-consciousness" causes one more schism in an already multi-splintered society. But with the pressure on, some say it can't be helped. Only helps those who had designs on acquiring some "airs" putting them on. — SAM.

## EMINENT EDUCATIONISTS-X

# Prof. MADHAVA RAO

## Distinguished mathematician and keen sportsman

BEFORE I set out to write this piece on a much loved principal, I have to keep two things in mind. He has firmly asked me not to praise him, and also to make the whole thing as objective as possible. He added, "Let me go unsung, unwept and unhonoured!"

Unsung - perhaps. Unwept - well... But, unhonoured - never. Even if he says so. Look at this letter written by one of his admirers: "I have a desire. Being a teacher of 30 years standing, I would like to read about an eminent professor like B. S. Madhava Rao"... Another old student exclaimed "Eminent teachers without Prof. Madhava Rao?"

Omitting him would amount to sacrilege - though I could hardly convince a man, so incredibly self-effacing and "unselfconscious" as Prof. BSM, about this. He finally agreed to being written about, only when his own song quipped, "If your old students want it, are you going to disappoint them?"

That settled it. The mathematics teacher had no answer to that one!

But I have been wondering how is it possible to write objectively about a college principal who would call you to his room to say a word of encouragement just before a debate; to whom a student could go and confide that he did not have even ten rupees to pay his examination fees and who would pull out the money from his wallet and give it to him without a word; who never thought twice about paying up the tuition fees of students, and who never made them feel obliged or embarrassed in anyway. He was a father-figure, sitting there in his unpretentious office - room under the clock tower next to the library, in the Central College where he retired as Principal after three and half decades of service in the Mysore University, as teacher of mathematics.

But eminent mathematician that he was, what his colleagues remember to this day, is Madhava Rao, the sportsman. An excellent tennis player also, this former State hockey champion who used to captain the university team in inter-State matches at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, took a keen interest in all sports activities. He was, perhaps, one of the few professors who gave equal attention to a game of tennis as he did to quantum mechanics!

No wonder he was chosen to serve as President, Vice-President, Secretary or a member of organisations like the Mysore State Hockey Association, Mysore Lawn Tennis Association, State Basketball Federation or Table Tennis Association. Prof. Madhava Rao made his debut as a tennis champion in the Mysore University, when he won the BKS Memorial Shield in 1932. As one of his old associates put it, "he was not just a sportsman. He was also a "good sport". "He took everything quite sportingly - even injustices which are quite inevitable in any career".

I saw some cups and trophies displayed in a show-case, and asked him whether they were his tennis mementos. The little old professor drew

himself up proudly and declared that they were his wife's trophies, won in horticultural shows! Which all goes to prove that this man who fights shy of the spotlight himself, is proud of the achievements of others.

This took me back to that other time, when as the retiring Principal of Central College, he was organising the annual celebrations, which also coincided with its 80th anniversary as a First Grade College. I had just completed my MA examination and still awaiting the result. Imagine my surprise, when the college peon brought a note from the Principal, one the morning of the function, asking me to see him immediately.

I raced with my heart in my mouth, as they say! Prof. Madhava Rao very casually declared that I should make a speech that evening, as the youngest "old boy" of the college, in reply to a toast proposed by the oldest old boy (whose name I do not remember now).

Aghast at this suggestion, I straight way refused. But the principal gave me a stern look, and said, "You are going to do it. Sit over there and write out a speech. I want you to learn it well in the next one hour!"

I cut a long story short, I did it. The other day when an old friend from Central College reminded me about this speech, I realised that Prof. Madhava Rao must have been a teacher par excellence - who could make his students achieve what they considered impossible.

He used to teach all classes up to the masters level in the Central College, as well as in the Engineering College. Having speics, Prof. Madhava Rao used to teach even advanced subjects like astro-physics, aerodynamics and the like. To him goes the credit for training innumerable scholars who used to qualify for post-doctoral degrees of various universities.

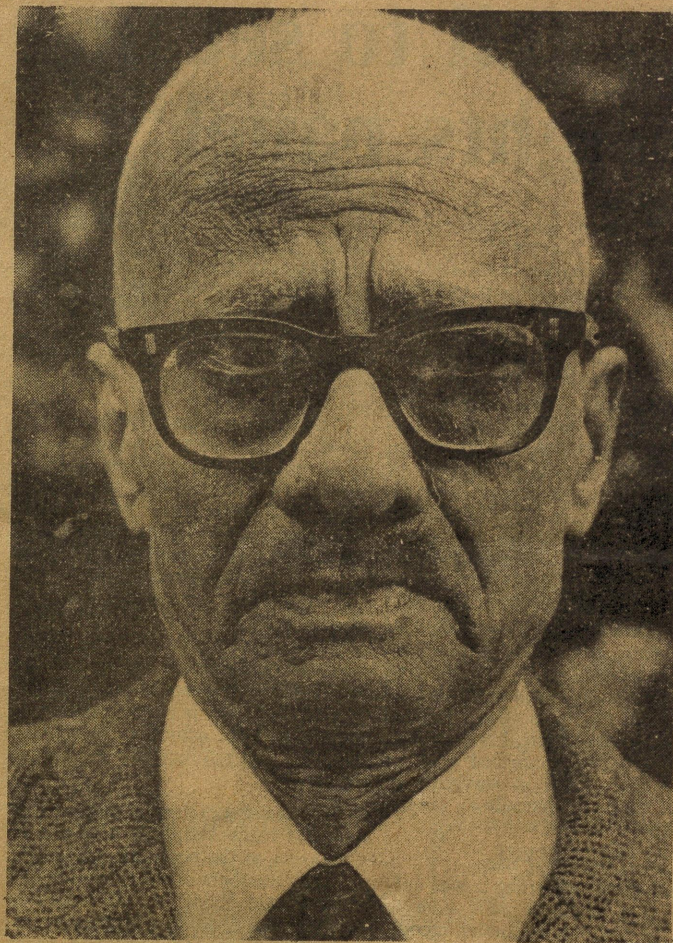
Of course, all this must have been child's play to one who collaborated in research with eminent scientists like Max Born, Homi Bhabha and C. V. Raman. In fact, both Dr. Bhabha and Dr. Raman would call on him for discussions whenever occasion demanded.

Naturally when Prof. Madhava Rao has been involved as a fellow member of various international societies, from the Mathematical Association of America, Royal Astronomical Society, London, the Edinburgh Mathematical

By VATSALA V. DANTAM

Society to the current Science Association - and headed several faculties and boards of studies in Mysore, Travancore, Andhra or Annamalai, his expertise in his subject was worth seeking even by scientists of international repute. He has served as expert member on innumerable university bodies in this country, including the Union Public Service Commission. Not to mention the countless lectures he has delivered.

But, what has characterised his teaching, lectures or symposia, is his deep sense of involvement, according to his students, colleagues and associates who have all echoed the same sentiment.



Prof. B.S. MADHAVA RAO Photo By K.G.Somsekhar

Prof. BSM was a pain staking teacher - so characteristic of that generation - who could devote the same attention and care to a paper on the Theory of Relativity at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research as he would to a talk on the military application of the theory of games at a

Defence Science Conference.

And yet, he was not a mere pedant. His original works range from over 50 research papers in leading international journals to two well-known works of critical nature. He has also published several critical notes and reviews.

Even after retirement from the Mysore University, Prof. BSM continued his academic work for many more years. From 1955 to 1960, he was Professor of Ballistics at the Institute of Armament Technology at Pune. Again from 1960 to 1965, he was invited to take up the Lokamanya Tilak Professorship of Applied Mathematics at the Pune University.

From 1965 to 1970, he worked as a scientist under the University Grants Commission and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

Even today at the amazing age of 82, Prof. Madhava Rao's services and

guidance have been sought by the Indian Institute of Science in our City, where he is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Theoretical Studies. He is certainly not the kind of teacher you can wrap up in brown paper and store away somewhere.

At present, Prof. Madhava Rao is totally preoccupied with writing a book on magic squares, highlighting the work of Narayana Panditha on the same subject available in Ganitha Kanmudi of 1356 A.D.

As his wife said humorously, when he is not ruminating in the Deer Park at Lalbagh, he is engrossed in the magic squares! "He needs nothing else in life!" she added.

Mathematics must have been a "grande passion" for this professor who, according to one of his old students, spent a whole hour once working out a problem for his pupils in the class and was then heard muttering under his breath, "Hell, there must have been a simpler way of doing that."! Which he did in the next class.

Born in the year 1900, Madhava Rao finished his schooling at Chamarajanagar and Mysore, passing out of high school with distinctions in 1915. After that, it was a first class in every

examination, followed by gold medals. In 1938, he obtained a doctorate from the Calcutta University (known for its academic excellence in those days) and in 1945, he was awarded the Ramanujan Prize for his work on the Algebra of Elementary Particles. By then, he had become a professor of Mathematics in the Mysore University, having completed over two decades of service already.

Perhaps, B. S. Madhava Rao was one of the few professors principals who was accorded a reception by the citizens of Bangalore, when he retired from service in 1955. Other eminent educationists like T. Singaravelu Mudaliar and V. L. D'Souza paid their unstinted tributes to "an affable teacher" who had made himself a "hero" to thousands of his students.

Though Prof. Madhava Rao has been acclaimed a distinguished mathematician in this country, I am sure he will long be remembered by his students and colleagues in the Central College as a wonderful sportsman and a sincere teacher. And, I think that is exactly how he would like to be remembered.

For, as he himself bluntly stated, he finds it distasteful when he is introduced on a public platform (as he was by a well-known physicist once) as one of the "greatest mathematicians in India"! Perhaps, he would feel happier if people merely said "he was one of the best mathematics teachers we have had". And he knew how to make other teachers too.

When I first joined the university as a lecturer, I reported for duty to Prof. Madhava Rao who was ending his tenure of principalship. (Ironically, his career in the Mysore University ended, just where mine began!) I remember that first day at the Central College, when I had to face a second year B.Sc., class - which was notorious for its share of pranksters and practical jokers.

I felt it was unfair to thrust this class on a novice, when veterans like B. N. Shyama Rao had walked out of it in despair. So, I went to the principal with the time-table and made my point.

Prof. Madhava Rao remained silent for a few minutes, studying the time-table. This is what he said. He could easily make an alteration and give me an "easier class" to handle. But, he added with a twinkle in his eyes. "If you can face this class and come out successful, it would be a testing-ground for you. I advise you to do it".

Long afterwards, I used to remember this incident, and how right he was. He must have launched countless other students on their careers just like this. Students who like to recall him, ferret him out for others to know - and pay a small tribute to him, each in his own way.

# Love in Australia

AN Australian production. TIM is based on Colleen McCollough's novel on the romance that develops

# AT THE MOVIES Humouring the audience

FOR YAWNS

comic relief in the film. George Peppard, carefully groomed to hide those middle age wrinkles, usually appears posing, impeccably dressed, against some skyscraper or the other which he's supposed to be