

25 Years in a Blink of An Eye!

- Siva Jonnada

When we're young, 25 years seem to be a long time, especially since many of us hadn't even reached that age yet! As we get older, 25 years go by in a blink of an eye. So, it was a surprise to hear that the Telugu Fine Arts Society is celebrating 25 years of existence...and to think that I and many others were present at the creation!

What was even more surprising for me was that my father was named as the first President of TFAS. Yet, it shouldn't have surprised me since the charter of the organization stated that it was to celebrate Telugu culture, and my father was very active for many years in promoting many cultural events from film programs to Carnatic music concerts.

I vividly remember the very first TFAS program held in June 1984 and the enthusiasm of all the participants. (I think I can dig up the trophy I got from that day....) We went to many subsequent programs during my father's tenure as TFAS President. Alas, I didn't have a videocamera at that time, so we have no audiovisual record of it.

Later, my father would reprise his role as President. This time, his emphasis was on the upcoming generation where he enthusiastically encouraged the young adults to actively participate in the programs and the organization. It is encouraging to see that my father's work in this regard was not in vane!

It is for the next generations of Telugus in this country that TFAS and similar organizations were first formed. I remember well the programs done by local Telugus in Philadelphia back in the 1960s and 1970s. I also remember the trips to Queens, New York to see the TLCA programs in the 1970s. And, who can forget the first TANA program in 1977?

Some cynics might say that these associations are created to sate the organizers' egos. Others might say that it's always the same participants at these concerts and programs. For a while, this may seem to be the case, but time shows how wrong they are. Each year, there is always a new face on stage. Each year, there is always a new leader who takes over the reigns.

When organizations such as TFAS were formed, it was to emulate the India that the members left. In our case, it was the India of the 1960s and 1970s. Now, with a new generation in leadership, it is the India of the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, a visitor from India would think that he was in a timewarp if he were to see a TFAS function. Thus, Telugu culture gets preserved in the U.S. as it passes by in modern India.

This is the way it is for many cultures in America. Telugus are but a microcosm of a larger polyglot. Future sociologists and historians studying the India of the late 20th century would do well to study the Indian cultural organizations in America. And, as for the cynical view that cultural programs are too parochial and only performed for each other, there are many non-Indians who are keenly interested in Indian culture and traditions. Thus, the polyglot gets integrated.

So, congratulations to TFAS for 25 years of existence. I am confident that it will be around for 25 more!

Siva Jonnada lives at Morristown, NJ. He is a Performance Analyst for the New York Power Authority. Among his interests are public speaking and writing about history and current events. His father, Rama K. Jonnada, was the first President of Telugu Fine Arts Society.

