

History of the Tamil League

Who would have thought that the birth of an idea in 1937 would bloom into a superb club in **1995**?. This legacy has been passed on through patience, love and belief by generation of men and women who have come to know the Tamil League. The torch has been kept burning for 75 years through thick and thin. The result can be contemplated de visu at Martindale, Réduit.

The Tamil League was not armed with a magic wand nor did it perform miracles when it started on the 27 February 1937. The people who started it, namely Goin Ringadoo and P.Rengasamy, wanted to see what lies over and beyond the next hill. The home, the school and the temple in their varied life and activities had been the traditional training grounds for our boys and girls.

The pioneers rented a small room 10 feet by 8 feet at the corner of Rue L'Hopital (now Louis Pasteur) and Prince Regent St (now Leoville L'Homme). Then they moved to the Hindu Maha Sabha Hall, corner of Fellicien Mallefille and Poudriere St where a library was started.

Later on the League moved to Champ de Lort Government School and attracted a group of intellectuals namely A. G. Pillay, S.Umanee, K.Tirvengadam, M.Thancamootoo and A. Pyneeandee.

A literary group was formed under the chairmanship of K. Armoogum. For his part Kistapen Descann played an important role in the development of scouting in the League during the forties.

The Tamil league reached its peak when it moved to Labourdonnais Square in 1944. The membership increased from fifty to hundred and the club could not close its doors to the growing number of new members.

The activities which at first comprised debates, quiz, scouting and music, had multiplied and other activities were added such as table tennis, carom, cycling, football, volleyball, adventuring during weekends and the celebration of Tamil Festivals and religious functions.

The 27 May 1944 was a landmark date in the annals of the Tamil League. The League was registered with the newly created Registrar of Friendly Associations. Henceforth the League was to be run in adherence to its standing rules and regulations.

In 1947, leadership changed hands, the League was reorganised, a group of young intellectuals joined the association and the revival which followed made the Association more flourishing than ever. Among them mention should be made of Messrs: C.K. Patten, Retnon Pillay, Cana Poonoosamy, N. Balasoopramanian, P. N. Permal, Manoo Pillay, Joe Mootoosamy, (Maraz) Mootoosamy, Pooloo Murday, Pynee Rangan, Vel Pillay, Namsoo Soopramanien.

Other avenues of interests were explored and every activity, except that of music, boomed up. In 1949, the League was forced to shift to new premises at Eugene Laurent St, (former Corderie St). The narrowness of the new premises did not prevent its members from treading along new lines. The League earned from Youth House, a department created solely to organise activities for youth of Mauritius, its certificate of efficient club running.

In 1950, the tenth anniversary of the Tamil League Scouting was celebrated at the town hall of the Municipality of Port Louis with great pomp. More than a hundred scouts of the League and its branches at Rose Hill and St Pierre attended the day. The guest of honour was Renganaden Seeneevassen.

The Youth Drama Festival started in 1951. And from that time nearly every year, the Tamil League participated in it and bagged prestigious awards. Well known plays staged are Sacrifice, The King and the Queen, Post Office, The Affected Young Ladies, Gardener, Guest of Honour, When The Roses Bloom Again, Shakuntala, A Pound on Demand, the Wall, Sheriff, 'Souper Intime', Les Cent Francs de Monsieur Dubois and Les Boulingrins.

In 1957, the League was proud to become the owner of a building worth Rs 17,000 on 70 Toises of land at 17, Church St, Port Louis. This achievement was a no mean one, as henceforth, the youth of the community could find a place where after their day's study or work, could participate and share in useful and creative activities. It should be mentioned that at this stage of the life of the club Mootoovel Sunnasee, Radha Ellamah, Manjee Seetanah, Bomba Ramsamy, T. Avamba, T. Oree, L. Mudhoo were among the core who stood by the Tamil League.

Football became an important and successful activity and the League was playing in the third division of the Mauritius Sport Association's League. Renga Armoogum was the team manager at that time. The scouts for their part bagged all prizes in scouting competitions throughout the island. Five of our scouts were nominated Queen Scouts, namely Ambanaden Patten (1964), Enkanah Veeramah, Vassen Ratnam, Veerapen Padayachy and Krishnane Joghee (1967).

Since 1967 the League had reserved a week in November to organize its club week celebrations. During that week, members, friends and supporters always flocked to the League to attend its exhibitions, fashion displays, forums and annual dinners. The most successful club week is reckoned to be one organised in 1965, when an exhibition was held around the theme "Tamil Culture Throughout the Ages".

However, the 1968 racial problems and the severe competition in the education system dealt a severe blow to the activities of the League. Many members also either migrated to or went to study in other countries. Many tamils residing in Port Louis also moved to other parts of the island. Private tuitions became more and more popular at the expense of extra-mural activities. Government took the decision to ban communal scout groups and the Tamil League's troop was disbanded.

In 1984, the Managing Committee took the decision to move outside Port Louis in a more spacious surrounding. It was decided to sell the premises and to purchase a piece of land where better and more relevant activities could be offered. In 1987, the League celebrated its 50th birthday anniversary with pomp. Among the activities organised for that occasion mention should be made of the staging of the play 'Anklet' which is an English version of 'Silapadikaram' written by Alengar.

In 1986 Cyril Vadamootoo and Krish Ponnusamy approached Mr. Peter White, CEO Lonhro Group for the purchase of a piece of land at Réduit, Martindale to put up the Tamil League Club House. The purchase of 2.42 arpents of land was successfully effected. Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo laid a symbolic foundation stone during the Seventh International Tamil Conference in 1987. The construction started in 1993 and was completed in 1995.

The building was inaugurated on the 22 April 1995 by the Honourable A.Parsuramen, the then Minister of Education and Culture, replacing the Prime Minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Cassam Utteem, the President of the Republic of Mauritius planted a Trochetia in front of the building. Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo honoured some senior members of the Tamil League with certificates of honour, among whom were Mr Amoordalingum Pyneeandee, Mr Manikion Thancanamootoo and Mr Kisnapen Descann.

The Tamil League, now owner of a superb building at Martindale, Réduit started diversifying its activities and encouraged more young persons to join the League. The League since 1995 introduced adult tamil class, aerobic classes, an annual treasure hunt competition, inter temples football matches, a youth group and a ladies' section were established.

In the context of the Foster Family Cultural Programme (Malaysia – Mauritius – Durban 1996) placed under the distinguished patronage of Dato Samy Velu, Minister of Works of Malaysia, a group of Malaysian University students, led by Dr Paramasiven Mootosamy visited Mauritius from 21st November to 3rd December 1996. The Tamil League played an important role at local level by arranging for the students to stay with foster families, mostly members of the League. The programme became very popular and is still going strong.

In 2005 after refunding about 2/3 of the loan contracted for the construction of the Club House, the Managing Committee decided to negotiate a new loan to add a storey. The construction took two years and the additional floor was inaugurated by Honourable Rama Sithanen, Minister of Finance and Economic Development and Honourable Rama Valayden, Attorney General.

To mark the inauguration of the second storey, the League organised an International Conference on Tamil Diaspora of the Indian Ocean. Guests came from South Africa, Seychelles, Reunion, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India and debated issues like language, culture, rites and rituals in temple ceremonies, women's development, music and arts.

The League has started celebrating the international events such as women's day, music day and family day.

Under the chairmanship of Gooroonaden Vydelingum, the existing scholarship scheme was modified and is now called Amoordalingum Pyneeandee's Scholarship Fund. The League finances part of the tuition fees of needy students who are admitted at the University of Mauritius. To-date the League has assisted 9 students.

In 2011, the League established a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, named after late Angidi Veeraya Chettiar, former Vice-President of Mauritius, to help needy families with monthly food provisions. The programme is generously financed by Mr. Harrykrishna (Viswa) Padiachy.

There is a lot more to write on the glorious history of the League. I have given only the highlights of the main events during the seventy five years of existence of our Alma Mater. May the Tamil League continue to shine.

