

# ILP celebrates 15th anniversary

SAM RAO

Santa Clara, Calif

THE US registered non-profit India Literacy Project celebrated its 15th anniversary recently in Santa Clara, California. ILP was founded in 1990 by a group of NRI's inspired by the work of Dr Parameshwar Rao, a nuclear scientist trained in the US, who returned to India in 1967 to work towards increasing the level of literacy.

Present at the occasion were the founders of ILP, Dr Rani Chintam and Dr Veluri of Chicago, Illinois and California Chapter founder Venki Venkatesh.

Over the years, ILP has evolved from supporting mass literacy projects to promoting integrated programs incorporating literacy and socio-economic empowerment and advocacy programs. To date, ILP has disbursed about \$1 million impacting about 100 projects in 15 states in India.

ILP has worked towards individual and community awareness, empowerment and sustainable development while maintaining literacy as a vehicle for change. The primary focus has always been children and women from rural and underserved communities.

With the increasing need of soliciting and monitoring of projects, ILP started a chapter in India in 2000, with Sindhu Naik, a long time volunteer in the US, who returned to India in 1998. ILP has partnered with several NGOs in India and has even initiated networking seminars and training sessions for literacy.

According to Census 2000 in India, there are over 300 million illiterates in the country. Quoting the figures, Venki Venkatesh said, "We are all a small part of the efforts in (already) achieving a drop in illiteracy of nearly 13.5 percent between 1991 to 2001."



Javagal Srinath and S.Vankatraghavan with ILP volunteers. Sam Rao

## Open House with Srinath, Vankatraghavan

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ILP held an Open House as part of its 15th anniversary celebrations at Santa Clara.

Guest of honor S. Vankatraghavan and Javagal Srinath highlighted their personal commitment to education and literacy. Srinath spoke about the Jagval Trust which focuses on providing education to underprivileged children in Karnataka.

Other activities at the event, attended by about 100 people, included kids activity incorporating facts on India.

Highlights included a presentation on achievements of ILP and a recap report by California Chapter founder Venki Venkatesh.

Dr Veluri of Chicago, Illinois who is one

of the founding members of ILP said, "It is heartening to see the progress that ILP has made, since we started it 15 years ago, and the passion in the eyes of the youngsters. It is our belief that we will leave behind a legacy—a 100 percent literate India in our lifetime."

"This is a great occasion to reconnect with many old volunteers, all dedicated to literacy," said Professor Sanjoy Banerjee of San Francisco State University.

The Open House included a display of 20 projects which are currently being supported by ILP, in about 10 states in India. Newer projects like Karuna Trust run by Dr Sudarshan of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement in Karnataka were also highlighted.

A fundraising drive was organized in the evening, which raised about \$60,000.

## Bharatnatyam performance by Chinese-American entralls audience

SAM RAO

San Jose, Calif

MEREDITH 'Merry' Jung, a young Chinese American Bharatnatyam dancer performed at her debut program at the CET Theater in San Jose.

Being performed under the guidance of director Nirmala Madhava of PAMPA Dance Academy, Jung's program 'Muni Vandita' featured all the elements for the *Arangetram* (dance debut). The dances included traditional prayer dance Ganesh stuti and pushpanjali, alaripu, jathiswaram, varnamam and the fast paced thillana.



Meredith "Merry" Jung in a Bharatnatyam pose

"Meredith really did well and even her *abhinaya* (acting interpretation) was excellent for a non-Indian," said 16-year-old Kamini Kannan who along with sisters Malini (14) and Shalini (12), recently performed their arangetram as well.

Bharatnatyam, the ancient classical dance of South India has been around in the US for several decades. However, it still remains a dance patronized mostly by Indian-American dancers.

The dance requires intense training and also a clear understanding of the nuances of Indian classical music, percussion beats, literature and the traditional compositions in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu.

Jung has been learning for more than six years from Nirmala Madhava. She says she got interested in the dance after she a video on Bharatnatyam.

"My brother did not like it at first but has learnt to appreciate it and actually liked my earlier and today's performance. I am glad my dad could also attend the program," said Jung after the performance.

"I did think of quitting many times as it's not easy. But especially after seeing high quality performances by dancers Shobhana, Nirmala Madhava, Rama Vidya, I was hooked," she said adding, "I intend to keep on learning and dancing and I am thinking about taking some advanced training in *talas* from a percussion master. I will also be performing for non-profit and cultural events."

## 'Little Dhaka' away from home



Women enjoying snacks and sweets at Little Dhaka

KALYANI VASAN

Artesia, Calif

WHEN Little Dhaka was opened in June 2004, little did the owners Allan and Ellen Chowdhury know that they were on way to entrepreneurial success.

Nearly 30,000 Bangladeshi immigrants have settled in the Mid-Wilshire area. They

often shop in Little India in Artesia because of the bonds they share with India in terms of culture, religion and similarity in culinary liking. Nevertheless, an authentic Bangladeshi joint where they could savor fish, or enjoy the sweetness of *sondesh* or rent/buy CDs and DVDs of hits from Bangladesh was missing. Once Allan identified this need he set about to opening a restaurant/convenience store to

cater to the need.

Today, Little Dhaka is popular with not only the people from Bangladesh but also with those hailing from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. For P. Singh from Punjab, the lure of the layered, fluffy *parathas* brings him to Little Dhaka every Saturday morning for brunch. For Jalil Khan from Dhaka, it is the *biryani* and for his wife it is the fish curry. Although one comes here with special preferences, it is the Hilsa, the Rohu and the Pangash fish, fried or curried which is the trademark of Little Dhaka. The response to these items on the menu was excellent and this made Allan and Ellen hire a fish butcher, who was trained to clean and cut these native fish and sell them to the customers. Little Dhaka also caters to the demands of *halal* meat eaters.

For those who have a liking for milk-based sweets, Little Dhaka offers *rosogollas*, *chamchams*, *sondesh* and *rasmalai* costing \$1.50 per piece. The main entrees start from the range of \$2.99 to \$7.99 for the jumbo shrimp prepared with squash and spices. Appetizers come in the form of kababs—*shish*, *nargisi*, *shammi* and *bihari* all priced between \$1 and \$3.99. However if rice topped with curry is your preference, Little Dhaka offers plain basmati rice, fried rice and vegetable *biryani* which can be topped off with chicken, mutton curry or even marinated Hilsa or Rohu.

Little Dhaka also accepts catering orders for upto 400 people for occasions. In fact, catering has become such a major part of Little Dhaka's business that Allan and Ellen have catered for over 300 events since their opening last year. This year's Eid celebrations drew over 600 people to a pitched tent outside of Little Dhaka in the ample parking lot.

