

COMMENTARY

Chedwin Park Came Alive on Occasion of 174th Anniversary Observance:

The Artistes Joined with Nature to Make the Event Memorable

By **Dr. TARA SINGH**

On Sunday morning, May 5, 2019, a skeptical community held their breath; they reflected on the last two years; and prayed that the heavens would not burst asunder with a torrential down-pour, as had happened in previous years. Their prayers were answered. The weather was glorious, a cool breeze was sweeping across the once productive sugar cane fields; the birds were busy hustling for food among the mango tress; and the clear blue skies beckoned the audience with assurance that the weather will remain brilliant throughout the day. The crowd reciprocated with decorum and excellent behavior. They really savored those precious and unforgettable moments.

Hundreds of people flowed into Chedwin Park in the parish of St Catherine, to participate in the 174th anniversary of the East Indians' arrival into Jamaica. The first batch of 261 immigrants landed at Old Harbor, St Catherine, where a monument has been erected in their (immigrants') honor. In 1995 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of East Indians' Arrival in Jamaica, the government of Jamaica issued a commemorative stamp. And Bollywood actress Ashwaryia Rai (Bacchan) was the Indian community's chief guest of honor on that occasion.

Next year, 2020, will mark the 175th anniversary of East Indians' arrival in Jamaica and a series of activities are being planned to commemorate that historic occasion. In a message to the organizing committee, participants and guests, the Minister of Youth, Culture, Entertainment and Sports Hon Olivia Babsy Grange stated that the Jamaican government will dedicate \$(J) 1.5 million towards the 2020 observance and

will also host a one week exhibition of Indian history, arts, craft and culture. Jamaican Indians, who constitute the largest minority group in Jamaica, enthusiastically welcomed that news from the Jamaican gov-

fruit-laden mango tress that lace the eastern perimeter of Chedwin Park, to watch and listen to an authentic exposition of cultural performances by local Jamaican and international artistes. Rakesh Yankarran of Trinidad and Tobago energized the crowd with his high

ful performance was rendered by the versatile dancers Shalini Juteram and Shalini Soochit of Trinidad and Tobago. The audience reveled in their performances. A guest appearance was made by Sasha Siddo of Florida. The folk dance by indo-Jamaican O'Neil

vance. To add something different to the program but nonetheless enthralling, well known magician Sammy (Samaroo) a resident of Florida but formerly of Trinidad and Tobago, mesmerized the crowd with his contortions and magical pro-

Hardwar of the Surya Narayan Mandir of New York City. He congratulated the organizers and the people for working hard to keep their culture alive under difficult circumstances, and made an impassioned plea for continued support of the Kingston-based Prema Mandir, headed by Mrs Barbara Persaud. Pt Ram also congratulated the artistes who performed with distinction. Dr Keshwrs Ramkissoon (Sanjay) of New York City also congratulated the organizers and artistes for their fine performances. Goodwill message was also given by a Representative, Mr Girish Juneja, of the Indian High Commissioner to Jamaica.

The 5 hour program was emceed by popular humanitarian and community activist Dr Winston Tolan of Mandeville, Jamaica. He expressed his deepest gratitude to Pt Ram, Dr Sanjay, Pt Neil Persad (who also tendered 3 songs), Suruj Mangaroo, the artistes and all those who contributed to make the event a great success. The vote of thanks was given by Vishwanauth Tolan, one of the organizers..

We also join in extending our warmest congratulations to the organizers, the Tolan Foundation, the National Council of Indian Culture, the donors, as well as all the performing artistes and the great crowd whose behavior was commendable. In an invited comment, a youth Krishna says that it will be nice if future events could feature more youth artistes. "We need to encourage our youth and this is a major venue to promote their talent." This is a good suggestion and we know that the organizers will take this suggestion seriously.



A dancer performing traditional dance.



Representative of Minister Olivia Grange delivering message



A section of audience with Pt Ram Hardowar and Dr Sanjay.



Shalini Juteram and Shalini Soochit.



Another cross section of crowd.



Rakesh Yankarran on harmonium energizing the audience.

ernment. The year 2020 also coincides with the 100th anniversary of the end of the indentureship system (1920-2020) to the Caribbean and elsewhere in the diaspora.

At Chedwin Park the participants placed themselves under canvas tents, on the cricket stands, and under the

voltage chutney-like songs that kept the audience animated. Many of the members could not restrain their emotions and jumped up from their seats to dance to his sizzling tunes. And the audience was immersed with these spontaneous side-acts.

An equally power-

and the folk songs by local Indo-Jamaican artistes were a breath of fresh air. These particular items (folk dances and songs) have died in other Caricom states but are still showing signs of life in Jamaica. Organizers should give folk dance and music a prominent place in the 2020 obser-

ess. When he appeared, the children and youth ran to take up strategic positions close to the stage to watch the illusions that left them bewildered as their attempts at rational explanation of those magical acts eluded their comprehension.

Goodwill message was offered by Pt Ram

The views expressed in this article are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the position or policy of the THE WEST INDIAN.