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## Hai Guru Murugiah

I was excited at the prospect of meeting the world-famous swami and expert in languages and arts, Guru Murugiah; in particular, I was looking forward to my interview with him, since he is reported to have the uncanny ability to answer all questions with appropriate palindromes. (Palindromes are words like 'Eve' and 'level' or sentences like 'M adam, I 'm Adam' which read the same forwards or backwards.) Before I report my interview with him, it may be helpful to summarize his life. Muruga or Murugiah, as his father Ramar affectionately called him, was born in the small village of Idugudi in South India on 1, April, 1941.

Muruga developed an extraordinary interest in the English language at a very early age and word-play and palindromes in particular fascinated him. However he remained very depressed in his early childhood since his friends used to make great fun of him for being born on April Fools' day. Then, suddenly one day, Muruga realized that his father's name (RAMAR), his mother's name, SARAS (his father's fond shortening of Saraswathi), and his birth – place, IDUGUDI, were all perfect palindromes when written in English; his birthdate, 1/4/41 was also a perfect numerical palindrome! Moreover, the first Tamil words he spoke, APPA, AMMA, ANNA, and AKKA were all English palindromes!

An enthusiastic Muruga realized what destiny had in store for him. Very soon he shot into fame for his extraordinary achievements in languages and arts and also took up a spiritual path. When he took a North Indian city by storm in his first visit, a local English newspaper shortened his name to 'Murug' (similar to Ram and Lakshman) and praised the abilities of 'GURU MURUG'. Delighted with this name for obvious palindromic reasons – Swami Murugiah insisted on everyone addressing him as GURU MURUG from that day onwards.

Here are some excerpts from my interview with Guru Murug:

Pasupathy: namasthe, Guru Murug!

Guru Murug: ARAHARA

I believe that a top official at Avis renting agency presented you with several cars for your use at Toronto when you explained to him the significance of 'Avis' being 'Siva' written backwards. Which of those cars do you like?

---CIVIC

Your second choice?

---A TOYOTA

I hope you don't mind me asking these questions?

---NO, SON

Which is your favourite language?

---MALAYALAM

What was your favourite sport when you were young?

---KAYAK

What is your favourite snack?

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---A DOSA! A SODA!

Can I get some for you now?

---I WON'T! O NOT NOW, I—

I see that you are surrounded by some very devoted disciples. May I know their names?

---UMA RAMU, REKA BAKER, SARA ARAS, SIVRAJ JARVIS, NALLA ALLAN, NAJA RAJAN

Let me get some quick impressions about some of the places you visited this time in your world tour. Syria?

---AIRY SYRIA

How about Lima?

---A MILD LIMA

Haiti?

---HAITI, AH

Dallas?

---DALLAS IS ALL AD

How did you like Paris?

---GOD, A SLAP! PARIS, SIR, APPALS A DOG

But I heard that you gave an extra – ordinary lecture on the miracle- herb, Tulasi at Paris and how every French home has a Tulasi plant now.

What was the slogan you used to start the Tulasi campaign?

---TULASI! SALUT!

Let me now ask about Canada. How did you like Niagara Falls?

---NIAGARA, O ROAR AGAIN!

Ottawa?

---MEGAWATT OTTAWA GEM

I hope Toronto pleased you?

---TORONTO GOT NO ROT

Which is the best Canadian city?

---LAVAL

How did you enjoy your trip to Ontario Hydro, which is responsible for supplying electricity to the province of Ontario?

---SO MANY DYNAMOS

I hope you were able to get vegetarian food during all your travels?

--- I SAW DESSERTS; I'D NO LEMONS, ALAS NO MELON. DISTRESSED WAS I

I heard that you created a musical masterpiece to celebrate your trip to Canada. What is it called?

---A RAGA IN NIAGARA!

Great! I heard that Madras Music Academy honoured you this year for this contribution to music.

What was the title they conferred on you?

---RAGASAGAR

'Ocean of Ragas'... How appropriate, indeed!... I also believe that you explain your painting talent to a previous birth. Who were you in your previous birth?

---AM RAVIVARMA

The painter – king who ruled Travancore? That explains it... I read the basic tenets of your philosophy of life you call A, B, C. Which of them is the most important?

---TENET C IS A BASIS, A BASIC TENET.

What is the biggest problem ailing our world?

---MAHA AHAM

Of course, 'great ego' is indeed the problem. I think I will take leave of you now. Thank you and namasthe, Guru Murug!

ARAHARA, O, ARAHARA!

(An abridged version of the above article was originally published in "KALA", an Arts Magazine from Toronto, Vol.1, No.2, Jan – March 97. Reprinted here with permission)

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