

Tribute to A fallen friend I came to know...

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ORIN in Hyde Park, a prolific writer, introduced me to the late Mahadai Das while she was waiting word for acceptance, into the Doctoral programme in Philosophy, at the University of Chicago.

Mahadai had an engaging personality that drew people into her circle of friends quickly. In a short space of time, Mahadai introduced me to Allison who was a student in marketing at the University; hence, we became the circle of four: Orin, Mahadai, Allison, Yvonne, all of us from the homeland. At the time we met, I was a community organiser.

Mahadai was the phenomenal woman I came to know. She was an academe and a poet with keen attributes. She was bright, tall, refined and extremely kind to her fellow man; blessed with Grecian features much to the envy of women she encountered; but curiously admired by the opposite sex wherever she went, they swarmed her like bees. These admirable qualities did not overshadow her concern for the future of Guyana, and the plight of the weak and powerless globally.

I recalled a meeting that was held on the northside of Chicago, where several Guyanese attended, and when Mahadai got up to address the panel of guests about the political and economic dilemma in our homeland, everyone in the audience turned around and was mesmerised with Mahadai's scholarship to the discussion. As a matter of fact, the buzz around the room that day at the conclusion of the meeting was, "who is she and where did she come from?" Guyanese in Chicago who attended the meeting became acquainted with Mahadai before she left the meeting hall.

Her transition to the great beyond on April 3, 2003, in Barbados left me thinking - the place where she was born, where she received her early education at Bishop's High School, the country she loved and defended, the movement she helped organise and the Guyana she knew so well was not her final resting place; maybe it was not meant to be...

A ... fellow Guyanese in Chicago who knew Mahadai, said to me, "you have to be careful how you treat people along the way, because you never know where your help will come from". Those words of wisdom and sound advice, brought me back to August 1987. It was the moment when Mahadai Das' academic career would come to an abrupt end; she never fully recovered from heart surgery. And her help came from Guyanese in Chicago that she did not know in the homeland, but she was the phenomenal woman.

I was asked to coordinate a fundraising drive for my fallen countryman. Mahadai gave me the

names of her colleagues and friends in the USA, including her relatives and I approached members of the two Guyanese organisations in Chicago: Guyanese Away From Home Organisation - African base and Illinois, Indian Guyanese Organisation - Indian base. Both groups are now partially defunct.

We formed an ad-hoc committee named Friends of Mahadai Das (MA-HAS) I contacted the Embassy of Guyana, Washington DC and the Consulate of Guyana in New York. Both offices responded swiftly. Abel Riley Nour, the Consul General issued a sumptuous cheque from the foreign student's fund upon the directive of the late Hugh Desmond Hoyte and sent it to our committee. We matched those funds with people to people contributions and established a bank account that bears her name.

Shortly after the fundraising effort, Mahadai returned to Barbados via Guyana. We saw each other in 1989 and 1995 when I visited Guyana. We lost contact with each other, but I stayed in touch with her relatives. Allison got married and relocated to San Jose, California, Orin and I remained in Chicago. Guyanese who participated in the fundraising drive periodically inquired about Mahadai. She left an indelible mark upon their memory.

Private moments, secrets kept are two lines taken from a poem that I wrote about my friend Mahadai. It summarises pain, life and conversation. It will be published someday in my collection of verses. At this moment, there is no more pain - she is at rest. Peace!

Chicago Spring

**In Chicago, winters are grim;
spring and summer like apostolic
revelations. Love's absence
is hard upon a slippery ground.**

**Hooded shadows thickly wrap
themselves into night.
Rainsticks, slender snakes,
hang from resolute limbs
of staid office racks.**

**The air's complexion
is as grey as a corpse.**

**Reluctant as sunlight,
spring peeps upon low turrets
of the neighbourhood, and March
air chills stay on like unwanted
guests after supper.**

**Old ladies march through late April
promises, secure in winter's grab.
Old men tote hats and umbrellas,
certain of rain. Careful girls
tuck sweaters into shoulder bags,
and guys wear jackets anyway.**

There is a lack of faith.

**April comes: shy sunshine, limping showers:
yet Chicago trees, naked atheists, unfrozen
still-life from a recent past, cannot usher
the new season's holy poetry of green
in its baptismal blossomings.**

**Like the first spring flower, love comes
tripping into tulips, dancing
to the rain. A wintered unbeliever,
scarfed against sun's slanting light,
won't pluck it for his unthawed eyes.
- Mahadai Das**

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