

GIFT OF THE GARBAGE

By VENGRAI PARTHSARATHY

THE British Empire might have had its reasons for thrusting the English language on India but it has certainly had a ripple effect. Our Vijayalakshmi Pandits and Krishna Menons and Swamy Vivekanandas have used it effectively at world forums. On the home front too India can boast of masters of the language who can use it delectably. More delectable, however, are those who unconsciously misapply words and maul them out of shape. To those who know the nuances in the meaning of similar sounding words, the pleasure that these malaprops give is indefinable.

One such is a friend I value greatly for his entertainment value. He was no master of English. A failed Matriculate he had a natural flair for "bloomers". He, dropped in as he usually does on Sundays. I wanted to while away my time somehow, and when I saw him I knew I was in for a treat. I took care on such occasions to retreat into the shadows and not interrupt his flow except for monosyllabic interjections and grunts, to keep the session going. We were in Bangalore then.

"The call of nature is irresistible in Bangalore, what with the venue of trees and green wild view points", he started off. "I am an out-of-doors type and never miss my early morning constitution".

"Of course, of course", I said and offered him a chair.

"You have shifted upside, I see", he said looking around my first floor apartment. As he sipped the coffee offered by my wife, he added: "There is nothing to beat the panorama of coffee to get one revved up. It sort of prepares you for the day blooming ahead of you".

"And, you know something.

The dosa is the best snack in the world. I can wallow three or four in a jiffy".

"You mean swallow", I interrupted and immediately bit my tongue for the faux pas. A few minutes of silence followed and I wondered whether I had broken the seance and a promising monologue. Fortunately, he didn't take my butting in too seriously and resumed.

"I am supposed to be a connoi-



seur of tasty delicates but I tell you, nothing but dosa, makes the lava in my mouth water", he said expatiating further on the merits of dosa and casting a meaningful look at the leftover on my plate. My wife took the hint and brought a couple of dosas for the guest.

"Taking dosas after coffee is like placing the cortege before the horse", he remarked as he got down to attack the best snack in the world. He continued his

chatter when a State Transport bus screeched suddenly to a halt, just outside the apartment.

"See the implorable condition of these public conveniences. I tell you the only way to improve things is to denationalise the drivers. The conductors are worse without etiquacy of any kind. And, the administrators to whom you go with complaints are too premature to understand your woes of tale". I just nodded my head in agreement, not desiring to break the flow.

He spoke about "contraband population" and the uselessness of Hula Hoop as a contraceptive, of "jovial delinquents" who were outsprings of the illegitimate 20th century, of blood "pleasure" cures and "paternity" wards in hospitals, on the need for fertilizers to irrigate the five years plants and so on. All this was heady stuff and I felt I was clutching a falling sky. My head started doing the rounds.

At last, finally and not a moment too soon he got up to leave and said: "I must be going now. I have to take my mistress to the dentist for extortion of the modular tooth. Let me take leave of your permission". Then as he put on his slippers addressing my wife, he said: "I thank you from my bottom for the dosa. It was absolutely inedible. Thank you, thank you, many, many much".

It was impossible not to be affected. I got "caught" in the whirlpool and told him: "I thoroughly enjoyed listening to your views. You really have the gift of the garbage".

"Thank you", he said and left.

"The tornado has passed", announced the weatherman over the local TV.