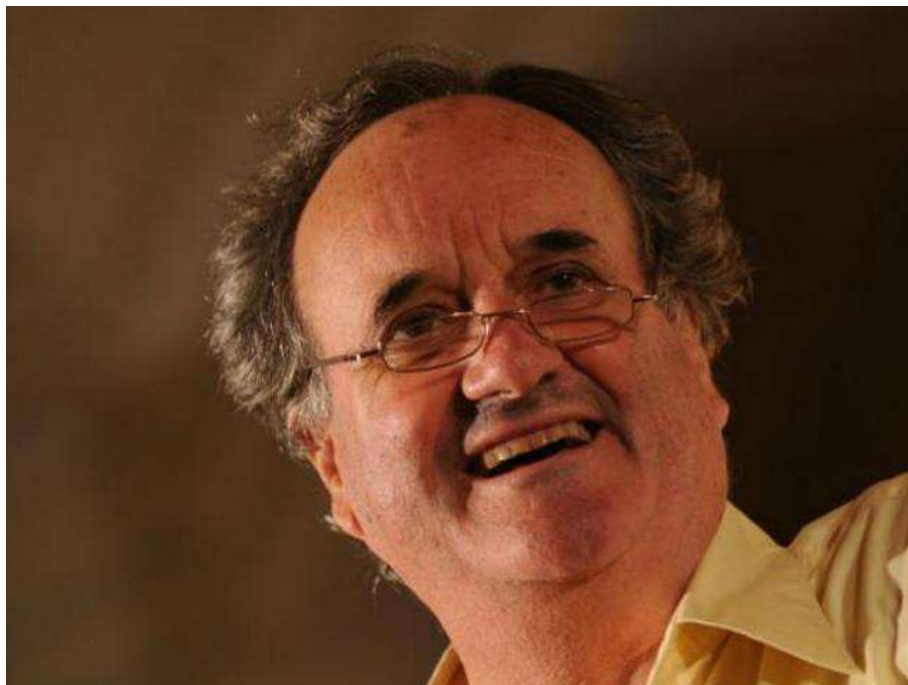


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**‘There are many ways to God’**

- [Neeraja Murthy](#)



The Hindu

Sir Mark Tully. Photo: K. Murali Kumar

*Sir William Mark Tully on his love for radio, railways and the lessons he learnt in India.*

Interviewing veteran journalists can be tricky, for they can guess your questions. When we share these thoughts with Sir William Mark Tully, former bureau chief of BBC, New Delhi, he laughs out loud. And, as a matter-of-fact, nods his head in agreement and says, “Absolutely, I can guess.” Sir Mark Tully was in Hyderabad to receive the Yuvavahini-Gopichand National Literary Award 2015, the programme held at the Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University. During a chat with him an hour before starting for the venue, Sir Mark remembers his earlier visit to Hyderabad. “It was not that many years ago. I came to give a lecture at the famous eye institute here (he means LV Prasad Eye institute). But the problem is that I am getting old and I don’t remember which year I did what,” he states.

Looking back at his eventful career as a journalist, writer and commentator, he considers himself lucky. “I feel as a journalist, I’ve been very lucky. I broadcast at a time when radio was very important. I was fortunate to be part of the BBC and as a ‘BBC correspondent’, became popular too. So it is all luck. God and luck,” he avers.

Recollecting significant events he covered during his reporting days, he recalls, “One of the testing times was during the Ayodhya incident when the mosque came down. The incident was also one of the lows in Indian history. “For me, India has always stood for religious pluralism. Of course, the assassinations were a setback — particularly Rajiv Gandhi’s. The declaration of Emergency was another low.”

At 79, (he will turn 80 next month), he keeps himself busy by reading newspapers and watching a bit of television. “Radio is my first love. It is more fun to do, because you have to do the describing. You have to write better; not that good writing is not important in a radio. And you don’t have the messing around of camera angles and reshooting and the response is fantastic,” he says with a smile.



*(Sir Mark Tully at Potti Sriramulu Telugu University. Photo: Nagara Gopal)*

### **Love affair with radio**

His love affair with radio continues as he does a show for BBC even now.

“The programme is called ‘Something Understood’ which revolves around subjects which many understand ‘somethings’ in them. It is not about current affairs. It is about religion, philosophy and art,” he adds.

What keeps him active? “You people asking me to do things,” he says with a laugh and adds, “I am finishing a book on short stories. I have written one earlier. I like writing about rural India. I like travelling. I am not nature’s great natural writer. I find research much more fun. I have just come from this wonderful research of two days on the narrow gauge railway from Jabalpur, which is about to be closed. I want to write a story called ‘Requiem for Railway.’”

One story he is passionate about, and wants to tell, is the story of Indian railways. “I am fanatic about railways. I would love to travel by a train and not by air. My passion for railways is balanced by my absolute hatred for aeroplanes. I hate airlines and airports.”

Any reason? “Partly, because they have undermined railways. Also, because it is the boring nature of travel man has ever invented. Whenever you travel by air, first of all, the experience is always the same. The same rigid announcements on aeroplanes, same food, and the sense of not having travelled to anywhere. When you go by train you feel you had a good journey, and that you have been somewhere.”

Sir Mark also talks of the climate crisis and the prevailing ‘management culture.’ “I hope that climate crisis will force everyone to rethink the way we do things. The fundamental problem is that we are treating nature as if it is a resource, use it and abuse it anyway we want. We are also treating human beings as a resource. In the management culture, people are treated as machines, not individuals.”

Talking about the new age journalism, he has a bit of advice for young reporters. “Remember that the story you are writing is not your story. It is someone else’s story. And also remember that you make mistakes and when you make one, you have to admit it. I have always said that any journalist who has said that he has not made mistakes is either a liar or a fool — fool for he cannot identify his own mistake.”

As a parting shot, he says, “India has been a big lesson and has shown that there are many ways to reach God.”

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