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Best in Billiards

Advani, at just 24, has won virtually every billiards title on offer at the national, Asian and world levels. he is the only Indian to have won the world title in both snooker (2003 IBSF Championship) and billiards. Thus, the sheer weight of his achievements puts Advani in the big league.

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A Lucky Baby Born 09/09/09

MELBOURNE: An Indian-origin couple in Australia has been blessed with a baby girl who was born at 9:09 am local time on 09/09/09.

The new parents, Dhara and Sudish Patel, said the delivery time of their baby, considered auspicious in many parts of the world, particularly China, was a surprise.



"Her due date was September 12," the mother said, according a report in the ABC News.

Dhara said the number nine would become part of her baby's life. "We think it will be her lucky number."

"Nine, nine, nine" or "Jiu, Jiu" in Chinese means for a long time. Thousands of young Chinese flocked to get married on Wednesday believing that the date will guarantee longevity to their wedding and life. The Chinese also consider 08/08/88 as a very lucky date.

Shirdi Sai Baba Temple Opens in Houston

BY PRASAD MARAGANI

HOUSTON: The weekend clocked a historic event in the religious calendar of Houston. Thousands of devotees from all over USA, graced the grand opening ceremony of the newly built *Shirdi Sai Jalaram Mandir* at 13845 West Belfort Avenue, Sugar Land, Texas on August 29 and August 30.

The opening ceremony comprised of the traditional *Prana Pratisha* – ceremonial installation of the deities, imported from India – of Lord Ganesh and Shri Shirdi Sai Baba, on Saturday, under the tutelage of Shri Satpathiji and other priests.

This event was marked with ceremonial Vedic chanting by the priests and bhajans from the devotees. The *Prana Prathistha* for Shri Jalaram Baba was performed on Sunday by respected Shri Janeshbhai Bhatt.

Devotees made their way to the facility by 6:00 am on both days to be a part of this great event.

The installation was followed by the ritual bathing of the statue in ceremonial waters and then temple was declared open for the public, who paid their respects till late hours of the night. The installation



The Prana Prathistha for Shri Jalaram Baba was performed by Shri Janeshbhai Bhatt

of Shri Jalaram Baba deity was performed on Sunday and was followed by the traditional aarthi.

Sunday evening was a beehive of activity with a formal opening ceremony, which was graced by dignitaries of Sugarland and Houston. All the dignitaries were effusive in their praise for the temple board and the community at large for providing such a marvelous facility for the public.

Shirdi Sai Jalaram Mandir had an humble start many years ago.

Shirdi Sai Jalaram Mandir was founded by Mrs. Laxmi Thakkar (Maaji – as she is fondly called by SSJM family) with a small group of devotees. With her relentless efforts and devotees donations, She made a multimillion dollar home possible for the presiding deities.

The opening ceremony ended with a vote of thanks from the President of the SSJM Board, who thanked the board, the construction contractor and all other involved people, directly or indirectly, for

their effort and sacrifices to make this temple a reality.

The event concluded with the 'Chavdi Procession' – palanquin procession of the statue around the temple, to the auspicious chanting of the Vedic Priests.

The event was staffed and organized by an excellent team of volunteers, who worked with an amazing sense of dedication for the whole duration with a smile and made this event a grand success.

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Kalyani Giri Honored with Distinguished Journalism Award by Hinduism Today

BY RAVI RAGHAVAN

HOUSTON: Distinguished journalist Kalyani Giri received the Distinguished Service Award - Through Journalism from Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the pioneering Hawaii-based publisher of Hinduism Today magazine at an impressive ceremony held at the India House on August 30, 2009

The award, instituted this year, is a prestigious recognition by the largest Indo American organization, Hindus of Greater Houston and will be given once every four years to one illustrious person, in various fields of work/service. Giri is the first and sole recipient of the Distinguished Service Award 2009.

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Journalist Kalyani Giri receives the Distinguished Service Award - Through Journalism from Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the pioneering Hawaii-based publisher of Hinduism Today magazine.

Photo: Nellie Naidoo

2 COMMUNITY

Hawaiian Monks Enthrall the Hindus of Houston

By RAVI RAGHAVAN & KALYANI GIRI

As incongruous as the visualization of saffron-robed Himalayan masters making Keynote presentations may be, the city of Houston was the proud recipient of benedictions and ancient wisdom from a remarkable pair of American-born Hindu monks toting Macintoshes and copies of a world-class magazine they publish in Hawaii.

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, affectionately known as "Bodhinatha", is the spiritual successor of the renowned Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. A few days before his mahasamadhi in 2001, Gurudeva formally initiated Bodhinatha as the 163rd Satguru of the Kailasa Parampara (which is a branch of the 2200 year old Nandinatha Sampradaya of Shaiva Hinduism). At that time, Bodhinatha had been Gurudeva's first disciple for nearly four decades.

Bodhinatha is the spiritual leader of *Kauai's Hindu Monastery*, the 458-acre monastery-temple complex in Hawaii. He is the overseer of *Himalayan Academy Publications* and publisher of the globally renowned *Hinduism Today Magazine*. Bodhinatha also administers the \$10-million *Hindu Heritage Endowment* which he created 15 years ago under Gurudeva's guidance, whereby Hindus can help endow worthy Hindu institutions,



Sannyasin Senthilnathaswami (left) and Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

publications etc. Already 55 endowments have been established to empower Hinduism everywhere in various ways. In addition, Bodhinatha oversees the challenging task of constructing the *Iraivan Temple* - the magnificent all-white, granite Hindu temple presently being carved in Bangalore and progressively being assembled in Hawaii. Many Houstonians have made a pilgrimage to the *Iraivan temple* on the beautiful Hawaiian island of Kauai and to have Darshan (divine vision) of the mystic crystal Sivalingam in a spiritually resounding Puja that is conducted every morning.

Apart from shouldering such key responsibilities, Bodhinatha is a formidable force in championing the cause of Hinduism the world over. Soft-spoken yet imbued with immense knowledge and a keen wit, the Satguru is a sought-after speaker the world over. With compassion and great kindness, this contemporary sage establishes an instant rapport with youth and genuine seekers from all walks of life, answering a wide spectrum of their questions and allaying their doubts. He has continued training and guiding the 20 monks of the Hawaiian monastery, the thousands of families who are

close disciples in a dozen countries, and continues to work with and uplifting countless devotees and dedicated workers around the globe.

Notably, every other year, he leads hundreds of devotees on pilgrimages to temples in India and other parts of the world, while at the same time teaching Hinduism and meditation to the pilgrims. His speeches are most appreciated for their clarity, their simplicity, practicality and great relevance. He offers advice in precisely those areas of most per-

tinuous need: what to do practically to augment one's happiness, how to learn to remold one's karmas, how to teach Hinduism to children, how to raise them as good, loving, tolerant Hindus, how to relate to a temple, receive its benefits and be positively uplifted and transformed--just to mention a few.

Progressively, more and more invitations have come to Bodhinatha from around the world, asking him to visit temples, participate in auspicious events, lead Hindu-teacher training seminars, and as in Houston last week - to address the

people. Addressing an impressive gathering organized by the "Hindus of Houston" at India House on August 30 2009, Satguru Bodhinatha, ably assisted by Sannyasin Senthilnathaswami, wowed audiences with slick presentations on three relevant topics highlighting the issues facing the one billion strong global Hindu community.

Presenting first, Senthilnathaswami, the assistant editor of *Hinduism Today* magazine presented notable facts about this high-quality quarterly publication with over 275,000 readers in 60-odd countries of the world. Embellished with visually rich Photographs, beautiful paintings, and an aesthetic layout, *Hinduism Today* magazine is available in print and can be read online free-of-cost on their website (www.hinduismtoday.com).

With an inspiring motto: "To inform and uplift Hindus, Hinduism and the world", this stellar magazine embraces everything of interest to a Hindu. *Hinduism Today* magazine presents, through a Hindu perspective, a wide range of topics encompassing the influence of every sphere of Hindu culture and religion - ranging from education, culture, cosmology, philosophy, ethics, sociology, movies, music, spirituality, food, cartoons, quotations and travel. Informative

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Arya Samaj of Greater Houston Turns Eighteen and Goes Green

HOUSTON: On August 23, with everyone getting ready for a new school year, Arya Samaj of Greater Houston (ASGH) quietly celebrated its eighteenth foundation day. Established with a handful of dedicated and committed volunteers under the leadership of Late Sh. Ram Chand Mahajan, ASGH has grown from its humble beginnings to become a leading voice and institution for the Hindu community not only in Houston but all of North America. Under the leadership of Sh. Dev Mahajan, who is also the President of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of North America (APSA), and with the help of his dedicated team of volunteers, ASGH is always searching for ways to contribute to the community and environment.

The event was marked by Sh. Dev Mahajan giving a state of the union report on the activities at ASGH and the two DAV Schools as well the recent proceedings at Arya Maha Sammelan in Vancouver, where some of the Arya Yuva Mandal youth had also participated. Acharya Sh. Premchand Shridhar addressed the congregation and blessed the DAV school children, followed by a grand performance by children of DAV schools. It was a feast for the senses to sit through these performances by students of DAV Sanskriti School and DAV Montessori



As ASGH turns 18, it is not resting on past laurels but is exploring new ways to offer meaning to the growing community and be responsive to the environment.

School – who also sang songs to celebrate India's Independence Day bringing a nostalgic touch to the event for those in attendance.

As ASGH turns eighteen, it is not resting on past laurels and is exploring new ways to offer meaning to its growing community and be responsive to the environment. This year, Arya Samaj youth – both past and present students of

DAV Sanskriti School have undertaken a major effort in making ASGH more responsive to environmental needs and go Green. Neeraj Salhotra and Avichal Gulati along with their peers and under the guidance of Sh. Dev Mahajan ji, have started a major recycling effort at the Arya Samaj. Houston ranks near the bottom of the list in recycling efforts for major US cit-

ies. The first step in rectifying this is to increase the awareness about recycling and inculcate that practice among the people. Neeraj and Avichal have researched various facets of recycling in Houston – What, Where and How? This is a multi stage project, and in the first stage they are drumming up support from ASGH congregation by collecting at Arya Samaj, all the

recyclable paper waste, and have rearranged Abitibi to place a free paper recycling collection bin in ASGH. Abitibi does this free of charge as long as two tons of paper waste is collected every month. The next stage will be recycling of plastics and e-waste with the help of more volunteers.

In the past, ASGH has actively supported community needs – whether its hosting Swami Ramdev ji during his Houston visit in connection with establishment of Patanjali Yogpeeth institute and Ayurvedic center in Houston, or pioneering the establishment of Jeevan Prabhat at Pondicherry and Gandhidham in India to cater to the needs of children impacted by the natural disasters that hit those areas. This year, ASGH has adopted ten Bhutani refugee families who are among the 20,000 that have been recently settled all over the USA. ASGH volunteers are providing them help by way of transportation, English education and assimilation until these families find their feet in this society. Under the leadership of Sh. Anil Gupta ji, ASGH members have donated generously in cash and kind to provide this support.

Through its two DAV Schools, ASGH offers a priceless opportunity for our youth to stay con-

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C'mon Girl, Let's Do A Bollywood Dance!

By JAWAHAR MALHOTRA

HOUSTON: On the last long weekend of Summer, a stampede of *desis* converged on the mound of the Miller Outdoor Theatre, lounging on chairs and comforters and eating those flavorful foods that wafted over from group to group as they took in the beats of Bollywood music set to movement by an energetic squad of dancers.

Their moves were pure Bollywood, except for the *Thriller* tribute to Michael Jackson that was fun but certainly a miscue on choreography. The Anglo crowd in the theatre probably smirked when the dancers came on in white-face masks, but hey, the *desi* crowd didn't mind!

Houstonians are more accustomed to high brow productions at the Miller Theatre. The Bollywood Blast 2009 last Sunday, September 6 however, failed to deliver on its huge billing due to a slippery production style. The dark gaps between the video clips and the music and dancers, and the enormous variation in the skills of the performers made it feel more like a High School Musical. But the friends and family of the dancers looked past the obvious and cheered on, all 3,000 strong, through the two hours of a mild summer night.

Still, the performers were energetic and fast paced in their numbers and the rehearsals over the past few weeks certainly showed in their footwork and hand gestures. The costumes and colors were marvellous to watch in their clever combinations, and the video clips from Bollywood movies that proceeded each segment of dance captivated the audience, a collective sigh arising as each ended.

The evening's emcees, husband and wife Subodh (of the radio show *Open Forum*) and Sonal (Ft. Bend ISD Trustee) Buchar started the show off by taking everyone on a train ride to far parts of the Bollywood past, present and myriad variations of styles. They kept up the pretense till nearly halfway through the show, intertwining factoids and some Bollywood folklore, but then the ruse fell apart as the train journey and the dances had less to connect to and the duo resorted to a homely, folksy dialogue that failed to connect with the *non-desis* who didn't know them well enough.

The first half of the show showed great promise in the dances and the freshness of approach especially as the credits rolled with a video clip of each performer turning to face the camera. The first number with the train riders was entertaining and original and the *kathak* dances to *janak janak payal baje* and a vocalist were enjoyable. The next few numbers were folk dances and based on classical numbers from the Gold-

en Years of Bollywood.

Right: Ostage emcees, Sonal and Subodh Buchar inetrviweing Anjali Center for Performing Arts Director Ratna Kumar; below left: the Miller Outdoor Theatre filled up with over 3,000 people (photos: Jawahar Malhotra)

Below center: Manasi Gokhale gets into the rhythm (Photo: Krishna Giri)

From below right: Dance choreographed by Mahesh Mahubani; dance choreographed by Jamy Abraham; dance choreographed by Uma Nagarseth; dance choreographed by Jasmeeta Singh (Photos: Navin Mediwala.)



Two *qawalli* numbers were well rehearsed in lip syncing and the dances that followed with them, although a more modernized version of the *qawalli* style. A few more folk dances followed, one in which the girls covered their faces to start of and were interesting in style.

And then the Michael Jackson number came along and although the music pumped the air (who doesn't appreciate the intricate tracks of *Thriller*?), the rhythm of the *desi* dances fell apart afterwards.

What followed was the influence of the Musical Theatre on Bollywood and then Hip Hop taking us all the way to the present time where anything and everything goes in the Bollywood movie. The dancers numbers, gestures and footwork started to blend into each other and became quite repetitious. This was the Fusion era and most of the items followed the tiresome line dances that are so popular in Bollywood now.

The evening's Director, Mahesh Mahubani came on stage, with a group of dancers in matching silver and black outfits and performed a couple of dances, twirling across the stage, arms outstretched, reaching out and slowly folding.

Before the evening came to a close, and the enthusiasm of the performers reached a collective peak with the entire cast onstage in a grand finale, the emcees brought out all the main choreographers: Jasmeeta Singh, Jamy Abraham, Mahesh and the Ratna Kumar, the Artistic Director of Samskriti, which produced the show, onstage for a bow.

Bollywood Blast, in its 4th year is produced by Samskriti, which can be reached at 281-265-ARTS (2787) or visit www.samskritihouston.org

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Kalyani Giri Honored with Journalism Award by Hinduism Today

By Ravi Raghavan

HOUSTON: Good journalism can make our world a better place is the unspoken refrain that inspires many budding journalists. What separates the wheat from the chaff is not just their commitment to objectivity, but also their creative flair and perspicuity of their thoughts. It was verily to honor such finest torchbearers of journalism and writers of excellence that the Houston Indian community came together as one and duly recognized a rare gem in their own midst.

Distinguished journalist Kalyani Giri received the Distinguished Service Award - Through Journalism from Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the pioneering Hawaii-based publisher of Hinduism Today magazine at an impressive ceremony held at the India House on August 30, 2009. The award, instituted this year, is a prestigious recognition by the largest Indo American organization, Hindus of Greater Houston and will be given once every four years to one illustrious person, in various fields of work/service. Giri is the first and sole recipient of the Distinguished Service Award 2009.

While Giri is no stranger to the Houston community, she is in fact, a fourth-generation Indian born in Durban, South Africa. Her parents Nadarajan and Kanthimathi Nai-



Kalyani Giri and her family visiting the Hinduism Today office in Kauai recently. Photo: Krishna Giri.

doo are respected lifelong cultural activists residing in South Africa along with the rest of her extended family. Giri was educated at the St Anthony's School, a Catholic school in Durban. Hailing from a Hindu family steeped in the Indian cultural arts, with music taught to her by her mother from a very young age, Giri was inspired to

study Carnatic music of southern India, which was not offered in South Africa during the apartheid years because of the cultural embargo. To accomplish this, she left for India and enrolled at the Queen Mary's College in Chennai. While studying in India, she discovered a natural aptitude for writing and became a contributing editor with

Pondicherry's Youth Age magazine. When the opportunity to leave India for the United States came up, she began her career in the USA by writing for the Houston-based Asian Woman Magazine, which accorded women an effective forum for expression on women's' issues.

Soon journalism became her pri-

mary vocation, and she has since written articles for local and international publications such as Hinduism Today, Indo American News, Voice of Asia, India Herald, and India Post - to name a few. Her interviews with people, their lives and achievements, and community events documented with a uniquely personal touch, make for fascinating reading. In 2002, the Asia Houston Network, an affiliate of the Houston city Mayor's office, conferred the Asian Women in Media Award to Giri in recognition of her contribution to the community through media.

"Kalyani is a wonderful writer, who writes with tremendous pas-

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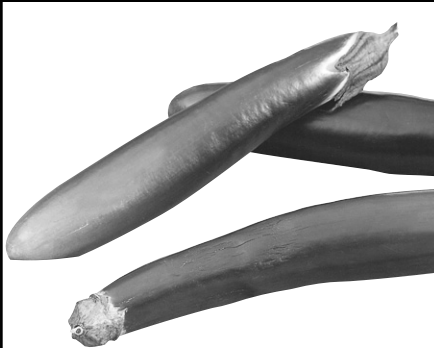
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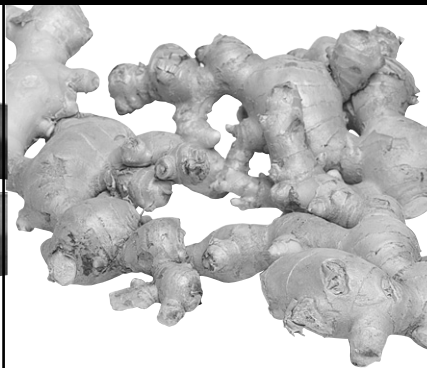
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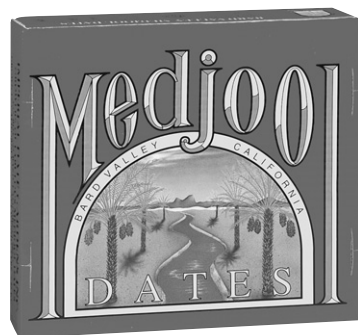
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Hawaiian Monks Enthrall

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

articles written in simple and beautiful words, by various writers, offer profound insights into modern life, with topics such as yoga, vegetarianism, meditation, nonviolence, environmental ethics and family life. Specific goals of the *Hinduism Today* magazine include:

- To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages;
- To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism;
- To dispels myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism;
- To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion;
- To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance;
- To publish a resource for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma

Senthilnathaswami's presentation briefly touch upon another online *Hindu Press International (HPI)* - a daily news summary for news media, educators, researchers, writers and religious leaders concerning Hindus worldwide.

Continuing the theme, Bodhinatha made

two elegant presentations, the first one about "Unity and Diversity in Hinduism" where he underlined the need to continue to respect and understand the myriad traditions that make up Sanatana Dharma. He continued to emphasize that all four major traditions of Sanatana Dharma - be it Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta and Smartha - are valid Vedic traditions that represent the vibrant colors of the rainbow of beliefs that constitute Hinduism.

His second presentation was about "Religion and Media", emphasizing that Hindus must engage the mainstream news media by grasping a clear understanding of the mechanics of journalism and newsworthiness. A video presentation gave the historically accurate details of the dark days of Hindu society in India during medieval Islamic occupation.

The Hinduism Today team invites all Houstonians to visit the Kauai Hindu Monastery-Iraivan Temple complex and explore their visually rich, artistic and multimedia content-filled Himalayan Academy website that is replete with videos and podcasts. (www.himalayana-

Arya Samaj Houston Goes Green

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

nected to their Indian roots and cultural heritage. DAV Montessori School, run by a very professional and dedicated staff is probably the only one of its kind in North America, providing not only top notch Montessori education for 3-6 year olds but also augmenting it with an early start to learning Hindi language and celebrating all major Indian festivals keeping the children in touch with their Indian roots. DAV Sanskriti School, which is conducted on Sundays and entirely by a team of deeply committed volunteers and teachers under the guidance of Acharya Sh. Praveen Gulati ji has also come of age, and its curriculum of Naitik Shiksha (moral

education) and Hindi language for children ranging from primary to high school has now been adopted by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of America ("APSA").

As part of ASGH services, both Acharya ji's are always available to do Vedic Sanskars for all occasions, Weddings, Birthdays, House warming Ceremonies to name a few. Every Saturday and Sunday morning from 8:00 to 9:30 am, Sh. Shekhar Agrawal ji conducts free Yoga classes. Shekhar ji is also heading the Yoga teachers program at Patanjali Yogpeeth of Houston. Every Wednesday, ASGH conducts Sanskrit & Upanishads classes. ASGH library has more than 4000 books available for you use. All the ac-

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One of Houston's Own Comes Visiting from the White House

By JAWAHAR MALHOTRA

HOUSTON : Not surprisingly, the banquet hall at India House was packed last Saturday afternoon, September 5, with nearly 400 people. Those who came could be grouped by categories: those who had grown up with Sonal, those who knew the family and those who had heard of her achievements and wanted to hear her first hand.

In any case, people milled around her in the lobby, after a few Indian pakoras and masala tea and pressed her hands, smiling, asking about her work, getting a picture with this woman with green eyes like her mother, Kokila, as proud father Ramesh Shah beamed close by. She obliged, the blue kameez setting off her eyes and her easy smile.

Sonal Shah, the Director of the newly formed Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation was a bit bewildered by the crowd, but touched by the outpouring of affection from them. "It's good to be back home," she said in her opening remarks, "where my family is." She was appointed to her position in April 2009 after working on the Obama-Biden



Sonal Shah, Director of the newly formed Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation at the White House addressed a large group of guests at a reception at India House.

Transition team after leaving the Global Development Initiatives, a philanthropic arm of Google. With a Bachelor's in Economics from the University of Chicago and a Masters from Duke University, Shah was well suited for her position. Asked if she missed the work

at Google, she said that she could certainly make much more money there, "but the time had come for me to serve my country."

So it was just pure coincidence that the Indo-American Political Action Committee learnt that Shah

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9



From left: Swapan Dharyawan, VP India Culture Center; President of the GOPIO, Chandrakant Patel; President of the India Culture Center, Keshu Patel; Executive Director of the Indo American Chamber of Commerce Jagdip Ahluwalia; Sonal Shah; President of IAPAC Gitesh Desai; President of the Gujarati Samaj Anand Patel and Ravi Arora, President of India House Council at a reception last Saturday.

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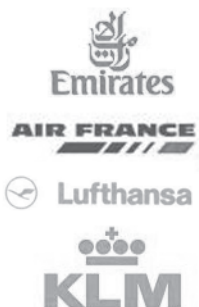
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Sonal Shah Directs Office of Social Innovation & Civic Participation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

was visiting her parents over Labor Day weekend and asked if she would come to speak to this crowd of mostly desis, including special guest Deputy Indian Consul-General D.K. Sharma and his wife Santosh, and a smattering of mainstreamers on a Saturday afternoon to highlight what the next generation of desi Americans could do, given half a chance.

The President of the IAPAC, Gitesh Desai was certainly impressed as he lauded Shah in glowing and honorific terms for her strides forward. "She is a natural born leader," he said, "Her humanity and integrity inspires everyone. She is simply a wonderful human being."

In turns, the incoming President of IAPAC, Ramesh Anand; the Executive Director of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce; Jagdip Ahluwalia, the President of the India Culture Center, Keshu Patel; the President of the Gujarati Samaj Anand Patel and the President of the GOPIO, Chandrakant Patel felicitated Shah for her work.

Shah wasted no time in explaining the geography of the political landscape her agency works in and showed how quickly she had grasped the territory. "It is a time of crisis in this country. State budgets are strained and the non-profit sector is trying to fill the gaps," she explained. That's where her agency intends to pick up with an agenda to harness the power of the people by encouraging social

entrepreneurship and making sure that non-profits and the government work together. "We want to find things that work," she said stabbing the air with her finger, "and cut out those that don't."

The solutions to social problems would come from the communities as the OSICP would seek out results driven programs. Its role will be defined and limited, locally driven from the bottom up, flexible and to foster civic participation, but not duplicate efforts,

with us through our website www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Strengthening-Civic-Participation/."

After Shah finished her explanations, she turned to the crowd and asked for their questions. Many came forward and she respond to them the best she could, even the one that asked if she met President Obama every week, although many remained focused on the healthcare program that is at the top of the Obama administration's agenda. As the event closed out,



Sonal Shah, Director of the newly formed Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation at the White House received a bouquet from Mrs. Keshu Patel and Santosh Sharma, wife of Deputy Indian Consul General D. K. Sharma.

Photos: Jawahar Malhotra

rather to support those efforts that are working.

With a budget of \$50 million, the OSICP intends to drive resources to the programs and non-profits that are successful by using the money for growth capital combined with matching funds. "We want to create better public-private partnerships, like Cisco which is helping with healthcare in Michigan," she said of one example, "We want to use open-source programs to allow people to work

Shah met with the scores of people who flocked to say hello to her. She was once again among those who knew her well, who had seen her grow up in Houston and who were proud of the local connection they now had in Washington, DC.

Sonal Shah is Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation, White House Domestic Policy Council.



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Asian American PAC Endorses Local Candidates

HOUSTON: The Houston 80-20 Asian American political action committee (H80-20 PAC) has released its anticipated list of endorsements for the November 2009 City of Houston elections. Please note that the H80-20 PAC endorsement for Mayor will be announced after the October 2, 2009 Asian American Summit/Candidate Forum.

The Houston 80-20 PAC is a non-partisan organization dedicated to keeping the Asian American community in the greater Houston area informed and engaged in the political process. Since many Asian American voters usually have little knowledge about the credentials or policies of the candidates, Houston 80-20 PAC has served as a guide by putting together a list of endorsed candidates for those races of interest to the Asian American community. Past H80-20 PAC endorsements have been pivotal in determining the outcome of close local races.

H80-20 PAC carefully screens candidates through written questionnaires and interviews. A 2/3 super majority vote of the Endorsement Committee, made up of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents representing the diverse Asian American community in Houston, is required for endorsement in any race. Houston 80-20 PAC will promote the en-

The Houston 80-20 PAC has endorsed the following candidates in the City of Houston election in November 2009:

- City Council At Large Pos. 1 : Herman Litt
- City Council At Large Pos. 2 : Sue Lovell
- City Council At Large Pos. 3: Melissa Noriega
- City Council At Large Pos. 4 : C. O. Bradford
- City Council At Large Pos. 5 : Jolanda Jones
- City Council District A : Lane Lewis
- City Council District C : Anne Clutterbuck
- City Council District E : Mike Sullivan
- City Council District F : Joe Chow
- City Council District G : Oliver Pennington
- City Council District H : Ed Gonzalez

dorsed candidates through ethnic media, mailers, phone calls, and block walking to registered Asian American voter households. H80-20 PAC also provide transportation for senior voters to the polls

H80-20 PAC urges the Asian American community to vote for the above slate of endorsed candidates. In addition, Houston 80-20 PAC invites the community to attend an Asian American Summit / Candidate Forum from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Oct. 2, 2009 at American First National Bank, 12th Floor, 9999 Bellaire. This is a free public forum jointly sponsored by H80-20 PAC and a number of other

Asian American organizations in Houston to educate the community on issues important to the Asian American community, for the candidates of all November races to meet the public and for mayoral candidates to respond to the critical issues with their recommendations and plans of action.

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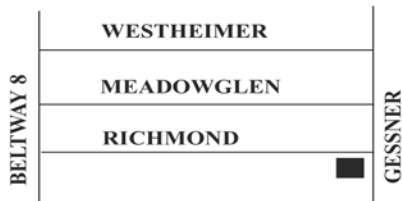
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Vibha Vibe: An International Festival of Music and Dance to Savor



BY PRAVEENA LAKSHMANAN
HOUSTON: They thumped their heels, clapped in rhythm and swirled to music. With glowing attire and colorful costumes, the performers left audiences asking for more. On August 29, the Stafford Civic Center (old) was packed with people who lined the aisles and jostled to see numerous performers representing various style and form of music and dance from across countries and regions, to benefit children in need.

The evening was organized by Vibha, a volunteer-driven, non-profit organization with a vision to ensure that less fortunate children attain a brighter future. The Houston Action Center of Vibha brought together a diverse international audience at the fundraising event Vibha Vibe - A International Festival of Music and Dance. This unique fundraising event promoted the rich heritage; melding cultures from India, Latin America, Europe, Middle East etc through dance and music.

While emcee Sandeep Sriniwasan bowled the audience with his appearance between performances and his prompt one-liners; the audience were fascinated by what the evening showcased - perfect hybrid of contemporary

dance concept and sinuous Indian movements. The audience was clearly impressed by the performances by Houston International Folk Dancers, Belly dance by Gabriela, Omni Salsa, Flute Dance among others.

The program started with an introduction to Vibha and its initiatives followed by the "Guru Brahma" mantra by Nina of Mantra Mom - who devotes her time to increase awareness of mantras. Artists from Sree Padam School of Arts, Payal School of Dance, Sunanda's School of Performing Arts, Natya Upsana Dance Academy, Rathna Kumar's Team from Anjali Center for Performing Arts performed on various forms of Indian classical dance such as Bharatnatyam, Mohiniyattam, Kuchipudi, Kathak and other contemporary forms.

Jasmeeta Singh's Team from Anjali Center of Performing Arts and Houston Diyan Mutiyaraan enthralled the audience with their bollywood and bhangra moves.

Meghan and Monika Rao performed on the famous "Jai Ho"; choreographed by Mahesh Mehbanani of Anjali Center. Renuka and Rena performed the India folk - Flute dance.

Strictly Street Salsa, Omni Sal-

sa, Houston International Folk Dancers, Del Espadin Flamenco and Spanish Dance Academy presented highly traditional, elegant and artistic move that represented specific regions. Focusing on a single ethnic theme the Houston International Folk Dancers presented a mixture of dances and costumes from various countries. Artists from Belly dance by Gabriela performed a unique style described as Modern belly dance - a fusion of styles ranging from Egyptian, lebanese, Turkish, greek and American cabaret.

Passion, Elegance, Dedication, Spirit and the effort put-in to make a difference was not only evident through each and every performance but also was glowing through the eyes of dedicated volunteers and the audience present to support the cause of benefiting children.

Kudos to the Vibha team who played an important role in making the evening a great success and put together a wonderful evening that raised awareness about the less fortunate children not only



in the Indian continent but also in the United States and also shared insights on the various projects related to the same.

In summary Vibha Houston successfully imbibed contemporary and other forms of creative expression from across the globe to spread their message to the Houston audience.

For more information on Vibha Houston and their initiatives visit <http://wiki.vibha.org/Houston:Home>

Vibha Vibe showcased the international flavor that Houston possessed through music and dance. The fund-raising event also raised awareness about the need to support less fortunate children

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14 COMMUNITY

Kalyani Giri Honored with Journalism Award

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

sion and empathy,” said Pramod Kulkarni, editor of Indo-American News, a weekly newspaper based in Houston, Texas. “We feel very privileged that Kalyani writes for us on community and cultural programs that reveal her in-depth knowledge of religion and the fine arts.”

It was a sentiment reiterated by journalist Jacob David, Giri’s colleague at Indo American News.

“Kalyani is a professional in her own right, whose quest is excellence. She is a lover of the arts, and focuses on knitting the community together through her insightful reports,” said David.

Community activist and media liaison Vijay Pallod, who has collaborated with and guided Giri for over 15 years on thought-provoking issues facing the Hindu-American community, lauded the significant role played by her and spoke from his heart at the award ceremony.

“Kalyani Giri has made a significant contribution to the Hindu community through her profession of journalism. She has interviewed many great Hindu saints and lead-

ers. She has a passion to cover both the major points and the seemingly minor details and has the talent to bring out the best in the person,” said Pallod.

“She has also covered many youth events and various social issues. When an Austin night-club portrayed Lord Krishna and His divine consort Radha in a way that was hurtful to many Hindus, Kalyani covered the sensitive story in very professional way. Her article about the late Akhil Chopra contributed to making Akhil a local hero and touched many peoples’ hearts. We are indeed fortunate to have her in Houston,” added Pallod.

Pallod was alluding to the prolific community activist Akhil Chopra who was murdered in broad daylight while meditating in an area park in this city four years ago.

Many prominent Houstonian community leaders have spoken loudly in praise of Giri’s talents and professionalism. Complimenting Giri for her inspiring and incisive articles, Subhash Gupta, President of the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, was vocal in

lauding Giri.

“I want to underline the fact that an outstanding journalist like Ms. Giri is deserving of the many more concomitant accolades that are destined for her,” said Gupta.

World-renowned Bharatha Natyam and Kuchipudi dancer, choreographer, guru, and author, Dr. Rathna Kumar has been a mentor and an inspiration to Kalyani Giri. They have collaborated together on many cultural events and programs locally over the years.

“The first thing I noticed about Kalyani, when I met her, twenty-seven years ago, was her extraordinary felicity of phrase, and her capacity to translate her thoughts into words so eloquently and beautifully. It is not surprising that with her gift for writing, she has taken to journalism and has given us excellent articles on a variety of subjects. That she was recently recognized for her journalistic contributions is indeed further confirmation of her caliber as a writer par excellence. I must also add that I am extremely proud that she is my sister-in-law,” said Dr. Kumar.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the globally celebrated author of books such as Arranged Marriage, The Mistress of Spices, and more recently, the critically acclaimed Palace of Illusions. She is also the Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Houston.

“Kalyani is a wonderful journalist and an amazing writer. I have enjoyed reading her thoughtful pieces over the years in Indo American news and other magazines,” said Divakaruni. “It has been my privilege to have been interviewed by her as well. Congratulations to her on a well deserved award!”

Rachel Varghese, President of the Indo American Charity Foundation was eloquent about Giri.

“To say that Kalyani Giri has the gift of communication is truly an understatement. Her ability to create phrases that are both poetic and powerful is what makes her words unforgettable. Her commitment to quality is apparent in her use of words and her ability to carry the reader onto the paths where she dares to tread,” enthused Varghese.

Vijay Bhuchar, a former president of Pratham USA Houston-Chapter, who continues to work tirelessly for the cause of literacy in India, was happy to share her thoughts about the award.

“I am delighted that Kalyani Giri has been awarded the Distinguished Service Through Journalism Award this year. Her literary skills are a breath of fresh air in Houston’s journals. We are truly privileged to have a journalist/writer of this caliber amongst us,” said Bhuchar.

Renowned musician David Courtney who along with his wife Chandrakantha, a Hindustani clas-

sical vocalist of note, have known Giri for the past 26 years, also talked of her loyalty to her vocation.

“Kalyani is like the invisible glue which has held together countless endeavors of the last couple of decades,” said Courtney. “Her involvement in numerous ventures both before the programs as well as in follow up reporting afterwards has often made the difference between a venture’s success and failure.”

Underlining the important role played by Giri was Nellie Naidoo, a fellow South African and Houston resident who was present at the awards event. “Kalyani will no doubt continue to promote our rich Indian culture as she has done for all these years and we all, especially our children, will be the better for it,” said Naidoo.

Kalyani is married to Krishna Giri, a managing partner at Indo American News. The couple has one daughter, Anushka, 17, a senior at the Micheal Debakey High School for Health Professions.

Hindus of Greater Houston is very thankful to India House and especially to its Chairman Ravi Arora who delivered the vote of thanks, for extending their hospitality and hosting this event to honor Kalyani Giri who has truly become a remarkable role model and unique Indo-American pioneer.

Creating Vrindavan in Houston



HOUSTON: The devotees of Houston, yet again have the privilege to experience the Shrimad Bhagwat Katha Maha Gyan Yagya by none other than the world renowned: Shradheya Mridul

Krishn Goswamiji. Pujya Swamiji is well known not only around the world but to us Houstonians as well, since he has been coming here since 1996. It is fortunate to

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