



ASIAN FESTIVALS OF
WASHINGTON STATE

Diwali

Indian Festival of Lights



Jack Straw Productions • Ethnic Heritage Council • Washington State Arts Commission

Asian Festivals of Washington State

Diwali: Festival of Lights

Joan Rabinowitz,
Editor



"Lead me from the darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from mortality to immortality," this is the traditional Hindu prayer. They say however dark it may be, just one candle, one light can destroy that darkness. That's what the light signifies

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A Collaborative Project: Honor Our Ethnic Communities

THE ASIAN FESTIVALS OF Washington State project was made possible through the collaborative work of leaders in the Hmong, Indian and Japanese-American communities, and the Ethnic Heritage Council, Jack Straw Productions, and the Washington State Arts Commission. The events included in this project were Hmong New Year, the Indian Diwali Festival of Lights, and the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival.

The Festivals

The Hmong Association of Washington has produced a *Hmong New Year* celebration every year since 1976 with over 1000 Hmong people attending each of the last three years. In Laos, the New Year was an important community harvest festival, marked by singing, dancing, feasting, and courtship games. In the USA, it has taken on additional significance, functioning as a celebration of the survival and renewal of the arts and culture of a refugee people making the transition to a new cultural context. The Hmong Association states, "We wanted to build a stronger social life together in this country, so together we formed an association to help newcomers and to keep communication going between us."

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is one of the most widely celebrated festivals in India. It is celebrated throughout India, not only as a religious festival but as a social event, as well. For many, it is a celebration of the time that Rama and Sita returned to their kingdom after fourteen years of exile. For students, it is a time to pay tribute to Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and learning. It is also a harvest festival. In the Seattle area, the celebration is hosted annually by the India Association of Western Washington as well as other Indian community organizations. Like the Hmong New Year Celebration, the festival enables the community to maintain important links with its homeland.

The *Seattle Cherry Blossom &*



Two girls perform at a Diwali community-wide event (Photo by Dean Wong).

Japanese Cultural Festival has been the principal community event of Washington's Japanese-Americans. An annual event since 1975, it has grown to be one of the larger ethnic festivals in Seattle. A traditional dancer who has received several awards, Tazue Sasaki and her husband, Yutaka, along with artist and musician, Midori Kono Thiel, have helped produce Cherry Blossom and other Japanese cultural events, for nearly two decades.

The Organizations

The Ethnic Heritage Council was founded in 1979 and is dedicated to the preservation of the diverse ethnic communities of the Pacific Northwest. EHC provides opportunities for exposure, performance, visibility and education to the hundreds of ethnic organizations that make up its membership. The Asian Festival project represents the kind of work EHC does throughout the year with a broad spectrum of Northwest ethnic communities.

The Washington State Arts Commission is a state agency dedicated to the improvement and preservation of the arts and strives to make art of the highest quality available to all citizens through a combination of grant pro-

grams and services. The Folk Arts Program helps preserve, present, and protect the traditional arts of the many diverse cultures among the state's citizenry.

Jack Straw Productions (JSP) is a non-profit organization that promotes and facilitates the creation and distribution of art and ideas through audio media. Its goals are to produce high quality, innovative and diverse arts, cultural and public affairs programming; to identify, encourage and support emerging audio artists; to make its facilities and personnel available to independent radio producers, noncommercial radio stations, musicians, and other artists using audio creatively in their work; and to serve as an educational organization involved with youth and others interested in audio art and production. For over 30 years, JSP has fostered cultural heritage through education, artist support services and radio productions.

JSP has been directly involved in the research, writing and editing of these booklets, and also produced radio documentaries on each of the festivals for public radio.

Traditional Artists in our Midst: Asian Festivals of Washington State

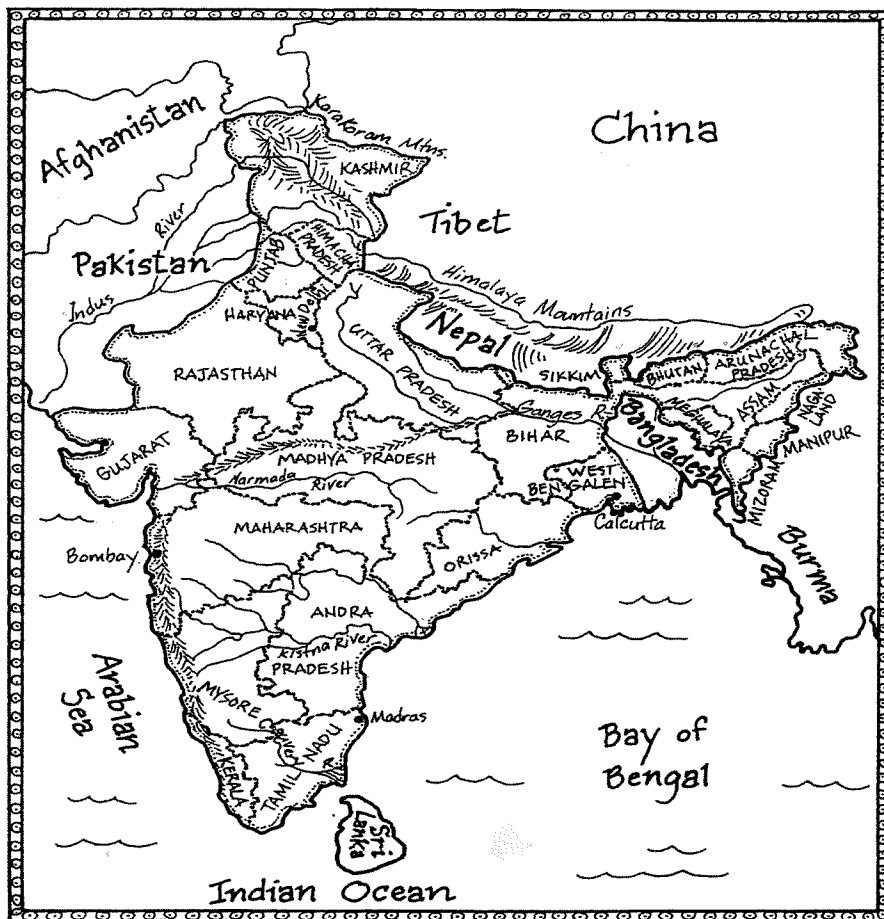
The Project

The Asian Festivals of Washington booklets are the result of a project that sought to encourage traditional arts presentation and documentation in the Northwest. Three Asian community events in the Northwest- Hmong New Year, Japanese Cherry Blossom and Indian Diwali- provided the focus for exploring how cultural identity is at once preserved and continually evolves within Asian communities.

The project emphasized the value of recognizing and highlighting traditional art and artists at important community events, informing the public about their work, and recognizing their importance within a community. This kind of acknowledgment encourages an ethnic community to value what these artists represent, stimulating pride in one's own heritage and promoting overall growth in the traditional arts.

In addition to encouraging traditional arts presentation and the work of traditional artists, this project also reflected the ways in which festival celebrations serve to unify members of an ethnic community by rekindling each individual's sense of cultural identity through traditional and even nontraditional means. Indeed, none of these events was purely traditional. Contemporary forms of expression such as popular music at evening dances, modern painting, and even commercial art were common. Each group of festival organizers chose to showcase that which, in its view, represents the essence of that community's still living cultural expressions while integrating elements of the larger American cultural context.

Aside from all being Asian, the three communities involved in this project and their respective festivals are not particularly alike. All three events, however, hold special significance for those who attend and participate in linking "homeland" to the adopted land. The art forms featured at all of these events give expression to the individual



Map Illustration by Barbara Scholen.

emotions that each member of that ethnic community inevitably feels. Traditional, community-connected arts hold a power and importance stemming from this emotional connection, particularly within the context of a society that presents challenges to holding onto one's heritage and maintaining a cohesive sense of community.

Asian Festivals of Washington Booklets

Each of these booklets includes historical information about a particular Northwest Asian community, about each community's most important annual festival and about the related traditional art forms and artists. While they offer some basic information concerning

traditional visual and performing art and artists within these communities, there are many more artists and traditional art forms that could have been included. The booklets represent just one step in the process of comprehensively identifying and highlighting the role of traditional arts in these communities.

We encourage readers to look beyond the information presented here and to discover more about the cultures that surround us, through direct personal involvement. We hope the booklets are useful for educators within and outside these particular ethnic communities and that they serve to encourage an ongoing process of learning about, presenting and documenting community-based art forms.

The Indian Community: From India to the Pacific Northwest

by Prem Kumar

ONE OF THE EARLIEST RECORDS of Indian Americans in the Northwest is Iqbal Singh Hundal, a student who graduated from the University of Washington in 1925 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. Hundal's parents were among the Indians, mainly from the state of Panjab, who migrated to Vancouver, Canada at the beginning of the century. These people had left their homes in India where they could not afford to pay high taxes imposed by the British government on their property. Western Canada attracted them because there was work available and the wages were 15 times higher than those they could earn in British India.

Coming to Canada

The records kept by the Canadian immigration department show that the first group of Indians arrived in Vancouver in 1904. By 1908, there were over 5000 Indians living in Vancouver and Victoria area. The immigration policies at the time were purposely made restrictive to stop, or at least limit, the entry of Indians who were considered the "white man's burden" and a blot on the white way of life. Nonetheless, their numbers continued to grow as migration was the only way to escape the tyranny of poverty and foreign rule at home.

Struggle for Survival

The men made the long trip from India alone. To control growth, women were not generally allowed by the immigration authorities. The men only found rough work in lumberyards, road construction, railway, and farms. The lumber mill owners liked these migrant laborers because not only did they work for about half the wages paid to white workers but they were also hard working and reliable employees. However, their limited knowledge of western culture and the English language made them the victims of social prejudice and racial discrimination. Many of these men later crossed the border to Washington state and found work in lumber mills in the



A young performer at a local Diwali event (Photo by Dean Wong).

Bellingham area.

Violence in Bellingham

The growing number of migrant European workers in the Northwest brought new challenges for the Indian workers who were seen as "not really Americans." When some Mormon Evangelists tried to bring Indians to the Northwest, they were told by the American Consul that the Indians were "not fit for the American West." General hostility and prejudice resulted

in constant violence against the Indian workers in Bellingham. The labor unions started a movement, Asian Exclusion League, to ban them from working in the lumberyards. Consequently, many of these workers moved down to northern California and started to work on farms.

Getting Organized

In 1914, the Komagata Maru, a ship chartered by an Indian to transport 376 Indians to Vancouver, was forced

by the Canadian government to return to Calcutta where many of the passengers were tried for sedition and hanged. This event, followed by the massacre of thousands of innocent men, women, and children in Amritsar, Panjab on April 13, 1919, prompted the South Asian community in North America to get organized. Although there were a few British loyalists, most people supported the struggle for independence of India. Many students at universities formed associations and succeeded in winning support for their cause. The British government kept a close watch on such activities by hiring spies. The most notable among them was William Hopkinson, who pressured the U.S. government to deport a large number of Indian students for allegedly planning a revolution to overthrow the British government in India. Hopkinson was later assassinated by Mewa Singh in a Vancouver, B.C. court where he had gone to testify against an Indian. The students were later prosecuted in India.

Racist Legislation and Immigration Policies

How successful were the British government's efforts to heighten anti-Indian sentiments in the U.S.? Considerably. For example, on April 15, 1929, the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who was invited by the Indian community in Vancouver, was not allowed to enter the U.S. by immigration officials. In the face of such a climate, the number of Indians remained limited in the Northwest. The Immigration Regional Restriction Act of 1917 had already excluded Indians from legally immigrating to the U.S. It was only after the end of World War II that the immigration restrictions on Asians were lifted.

Freedom Followed by Growth

Although India became a free country on August 15, 1947, which should have made immigration of Indians to the U.S. easier, the Indian Exclusion Act was repealed much later than the similar Chinese Exclusion Act. The major growth in the Indian population in the Northwest occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Indian

doctors and nurses were allowed to immigrate to the U.S. to fill the shortage of doctors created by the Vietnam war. Many students who had completed their education at American universities also found employment with American companies. Notably, The Boeing Company hired several engineers and technicians, followed by Lockheed Shipbuilding, Weyerhaeuser, and other major companies. Most recently,



The community continues with festival traditions, like these young Diwali performers (Photo by Dean Wong).

Microsoft Corporation has employed a large number of programmers, analysts, and other personnel.

Indian Americans in the Northwest Today

The Indian American population in the Northwest is now estimated at over 10,000. This includes people from the Indian subcontinent and the Indians of origin in Fiji Islands, West Indies, and South Africa. It is a vibrant community of individuals working in predominantly professional fields. Many have opted to start their own business ventures in engineering, construction, and consulting with considerable success. Although a relatively young community compared with other ethnic communities, Indian Americans have started to play an active role in the political and civic process. In 1992, an Indian American was elected to become the mayor of Burien, while another Indian American entered the race for the Washington State Legislature.

Social and Cultural Life

The Indian American community in the Northwest, as in other parts of the country, continues to preserve the cultural, spiritual, and artistic traditions of their heritage. Several organizations work year-round to present the cultural life of various regions in India where the people came from. A new cultural center is being planned to fulfill the

social needs of the community. The number of businesses — restaurants, boutiques, food stores, and music and video stores - is steadily growing in proportion to the growing population in the area.

Indian American Youth

Indian American youth have continued to prove the high value placed on education by their parents by winning high honors and landing admission to the top rated universities around the country. Several youngsters have won prestigious titles and positions as the SeaFair Queen, Miss Teen Washington, and SeaFair Ambassadors, to name a few. Many young people are involved in community and civic affairs — making a significant contribution to the economic, social, and cultural prosperity of the United States of America.

Celebrating Diwali:

Festival of Lights Calls for Prosperity and Tradition

by Kay Norton

DIWALI, THE "FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS," occurs during the autumn harvest season in October and November, and is celebrated across the Indian subcontinent. It is alternately known as Dipavali, literally "a row of lamps." There are numerous legends and local customs associated with this festival, but common to all is the lighting of homes, pathways, temples, and even government buildings, with hundreds of small clay lamps or candles.



Home shrine in honor of Laxmi (Photo by Joan Rabinowitz).

Firecrackers, thought to frighten away evil spirits, are also used with abandon, which makes this a particularly popular festival for children. Ancestors are believed to visit on this night and the lights, torches, and lanterns help guide them to their homes.

Although Diwali cannot be said to celebrate any one particular god or goddess, it is on this night of the new moon that Laxmi, goddess of wealth, visits the homes lit by her devotees and bestows her boon of prosperity for the coming year. Merchants are particularly interested in attracting the good graces of the goddess, and many begin their fiscal year at this time. Likewise, gambling is a common

pastime during this festival, for it is believed that the winner will have financial success during the year. For some families a special box is kept inside the home, and on this day a silver or gold coin will be added in Laxmi's honor. One should not look inside the box nor use the accumulated coins during the year. It is hoped that Laxmi will find her way to the box, and with her blessing the contents will multiply.

Diwali takes place at the darkest time of the month, and is thought by many to symbolize the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil.

Most of the legends that this festival embraces honor the victor of just such a battle. In the North, Diwali is commonly celebrated as the day that Rama returned to his throne after fourteen years of exile. He defeated the evil Ravana in a legendary battle, and is welcomed back with lights to his ancient kingdom of Ayodhya. Diwali is often preceded by enactments of this famous battle during the Dasahera festival, or by a ritual chanting of the tale.

In the South, Diwali often commemorates the conquering of the demon Asura Naraka, a powerful king of Assam, who imprisoned tens of thousands of inhabitants. It was Krishna who finally subdued Naraka and freed the prisoners.

Another commonly celebrated myth in South India is that of Vishnu in his Vamana dwarf incarnation, rescuing the worlds of gods and men from the powerful Bali. Bali had been a faithful worshipper of the goddess Laxmi, and had gained so much power as a result that he had begun to take control of the world of the gods. Laxmi and other gods became alarmed and requested Vishnu to intercede, which he did in the form of Vamana, a begging dwarf. Vamana approached Bali and requested the space equal to three of Bali's own footsteps, and Bali agreed. Vishnu then grew to enormous size and in two strides covered the heaven and earth. He asked where he should make his third step, and Bali said "on my back." With that, Vishnu's third step pushed Bali into the underworld,



A woman draws Rangoli on the basement floor of a Seattle home during a Diwali celebration (Photo by Joan Rabinowitz).

and the worlds of men and gods were saved.

In Bengal it is Kali who is celebrated during Diwali. She is said to have gone on a frenzy of destruction after defeating the evil asuras and with Siva's help she was finally brought under control and worshipped on the night of Diwali. The goddess Laxmi is worshipped in Bengal in a separate festival on the full moon, Laxmi Purnima, two weeks later.

There are many preparations that must be made for Diwali. Homes are cleaned and whitewashed after the summer monsoon rains, and made ready for the approaching winter months. This must be done by Diwali, as it is known that Laxmi will pass over a house that is dirty. Rice flour floor paintings are commonly found decorating the homes during Diwali. Sometimes the paintings are drawn just outside the doorway and continue with a trail leading Laxmi into the home. Auspicious banana leaves may be placed at

entrances. A variety of house decorations are sold in impromptu markets set up in the streets and bazaars catering to the special demands of the season. In addition to stands selling sweets, special breads, seasonal fruits and nuts, one can find tinsel decorations of all kinds, strings of small electric lights, statues and pictures of Laxmi or other favored gods and goddesses of the season, and stencils for making floor paintings or mandalas.

Celebrations in the home vary from region to region, and from family to family. For some the day is celebrated with religious fasts, oil baths and other rituals, while for others it is primarily a social occasion with visiting relatives and friends, exchange of sweets and food items, and a time of giving and receiving new clothes or utensils for the year.

Diwali sometimes refers to the specific day that is the focus of the festival, and sometimes to the longer period of three to five days that

surround it. A variety of occasions, some related to and some independent of Diwali are celebrated during this period. Two days before the new moon Dhan Teras may be celebrated in honor of Dhanvantri, the mythical physician of the gods and compiler of the ancient Ayurvedic texts for treatment of disease. The day directly preceding the new moon is sometimes called Chhoti Diwali, "small Diwali," and a few lamps may be set out in strategic places in the home. The day after the new moon is celebrated by many as Govardhan Puja, in commemoration of Krishna's raising the sacred Mount Govardhan on his finger to shield the inhabitants from Indra's torrential rains.

The second day following the new moon is commonly called "brothers day." On this day sisters give their brothers a blessing with a special tilaka mark on the forehead, and wish them long life. The brother offers a new sari and food items to the sister in return. In many areas Yama, the god of death, is honored during Diwali and a variety of rituals are performed to ensure a long life. Other customs observed within this period include the worship of Sarasvati, goddess of learning and the arts, when small children will be given their first lesson in reading and writing; and celebrations in honor of the recent harvest.

Whether Diwali is celebrated as a region's largest festival or one of less prominence, the festival of Diwali with its display of lights and fireworks, is one of the most widely celebrated festivals on the Indian subcontinent.

Diwali in Seattle:

The Joyous Traditions Continue

by Joan Rabinowitz

IAWW MEMBERS PREM KUMAR, ARUN SOMANI AND friends are setting up signs and tables in the hallway outside the auditorium of Ingraham High School. Rashmi is hanging decorations to make the auditorium festive and cheerful. They are preparing for the annual Diwali celebration, which will bring together over a thousand people to watch both adults and children perform Indian regional dances and music. This is one of many events which will take place over three weeks to celebrate Diwali.

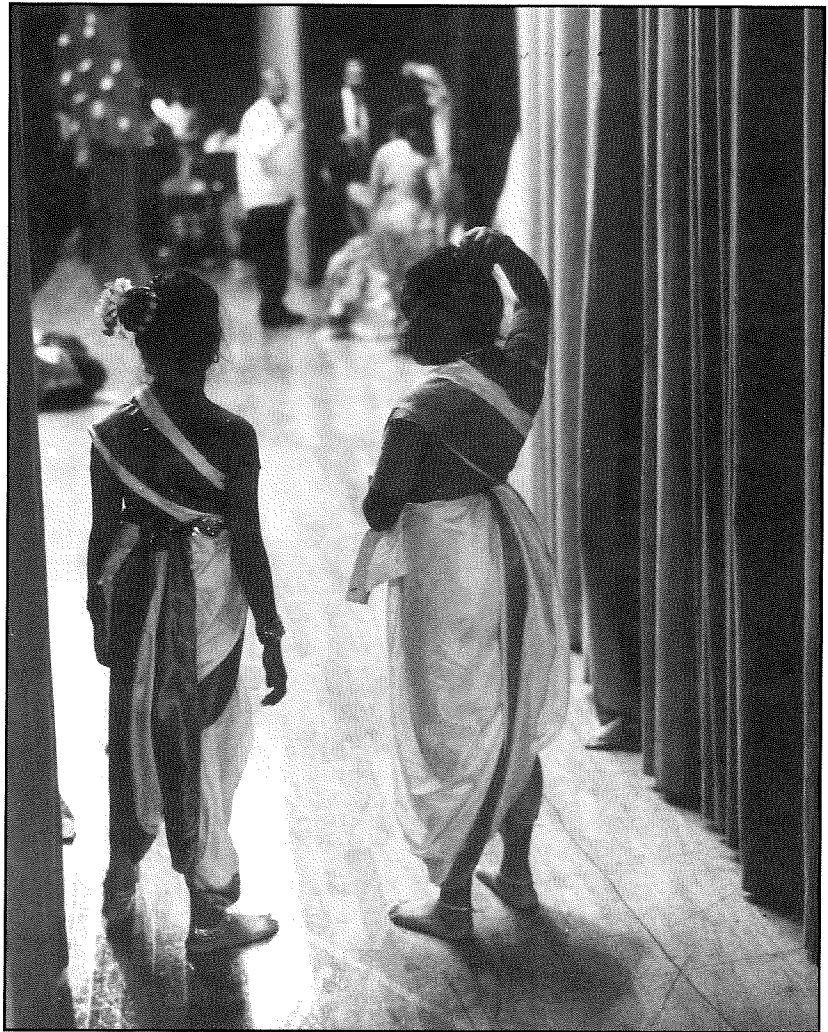
Every year in the fall, Puget Sound's Indian community comes together for Diwali. The community is made up of people from many different regions of India as well as from countries outside of India such as Pakistan and Fiji. Many of the regional groups put on events throughout the year that are specific to their group. Diwali is the one holiday which can be shared by everyone. "I think that all the other festivals have definite reasons for being celebrated," Shantha Benegal explains. "For instance, Durga puja is Durga's festival, and Ganesh Chaturthi is Ganesh's festival, and so on. Whereas Diwali is less definite. Different parts of India celebrate it for different reasons. I think that's what makes it belong to everybody. It's more secular and maybe that's why it lends itself to community celebrations more than other festivals do. People who are not Hindus can celebrate it, because it is a time of one season ending and another season beginning. And, it's a time of jollity."

Arun decorates a shrine to Laxmi. "All is offered to the god. The red rice, the thread and some flowers." Traditional Indian arts, such as rangoli and henna painting, are demonstrated at nearby tables. At another table, there is betel nut to chew and cardamon to cleanse the palette.

The public celebrations are held on weekend evenings, and they are always crowded. Some people come to watch the performances, others to socialize. The dances, which come from all over India, tell the story of Diwali. Some dances depict the stories of the gods and offer the gods praise. Other performances describe the events of a Diwali day such as the lighting of oil lamps. There are folk dances from Rajasthan, the Punjab, Gujarat; Kathak dance, Odissi dance and Bharata Natyam; Marati songs, Qawali singing, and tribal dances.

"The community here comes from different areas in India," Prem explains. "They bring with them different types of artistic skills and art forms. So, we try to take advantage of that situation and put together a program that will give an opportu-

nity to all of those people. It gives the community a feeling of togetherness. This is one of the few functions which brings in people from all parts, with all types of backgrounds, and it gives them a sense of common identity: they are together, they are doing things at the same time and place, in their own way. So, it preserves their separateness, yet togetherness. That is one of the highlights of this festival."



*Dancers get ready backstage at a local Diwali celebration
(Photo by Dean Wong).*

There are people of all ages here. Backstage, the mothers and teachers help the younger children get ready to perform. They work hard to prepare each year for this event, the mothers often driving forty or fifty miles to get to rehearsals. "The focus of the festival is usually to provide an outlet for local talent," Shantha explains. "That's the reason they celebrate in India, also in a community way. I think the older people who



A Laxmi shrine at a Diwali celebration (Photo by Joan Rabinowitz).

have had connections with India realize the importance of what they had and they don't want their kids to miss that. The Diwali functions provide a link between the old country and the new country. The old culture and the new culture."

Following the performance, the audience moves to the cafeteria, where long tables are filled with traditional Diwali foods, such as cauliflower, cottage cheese and beans, and many sweets, such as gulab jamun. Arun Somani recalls that in India, "it's not uncommon to have eleven to fifteen different kinds of sweets. Most of them are made of pure sugar. You take sesame seeds, and coat them with sugar. You crystallize sugar, and that's offered to the gods." "It's a custom to exchange sweets and good wishes with neighbors," says Shantha Benegal. "Even if you've made enemies with your neighbors, in Diwali time you are supposed to forget all this and then make friends again."

After it is all over, people continue to congregate and talk. A group of

young boys five to seven are excited after having just performed. High school and college students talk in small groups. "This is the only occasion the girls get to dress up, show off their clothes, jewelry," one student observed. "Otherwise, they live in the American world. They were born and grew up here, most of them. This is like their culture is still alive. That's the heritage of Indian people. They migrate from place to place, live in other countries, but keep their culture, their food, their language, with them. Which is nice. That's part of it. Part of their life."

The festivities continue the following day, when many people celebrate Diwali in their homes. Raghava Reddy is from Bangalore, in the state of Karnataka in South India. He and his family live in Seattle. They begin preparing food for Diwali several days in advance. Food is an important part of this holiday; food for the gods and food for friends and family. The women continue to cook in the kitchen as the guests arrive. "I'm making Prasadam," says Lavanya, Raghava's wife. "It's made

with butter, milk, raisins, cashew nuts. When we do a puja, we usually offer that to the god. It's almost like milk pudding. And, whenever we do any worship to the god, we offer that first."

The home celebration begins with a puja. "In that ceremony," Prem Kumar explains, "you offer things like flowers and other items, sweets, grains, which all represent certain things, to your gods and goddesses. Each family will celebrate in their own way, depending upon which god or goddess they believe in and worship."

Nasima Arani, who is from Madras, and lives in Edmonds, leads the puja. "We are trying to perform puja for two gods," he explains. "To start with, we do Ganesh Puja. We pray to him basically to invoke his blessing so the prayer will go smoothly. And then, after that's done, we pray to Goddess Laxmi. She's the goddess for giving wealth and well-being. So, we seek her blessings. Then, her husband is Vishnu. He's the protector of all mankind. So, we pray to him also, at the end."

After the offerings of prayers and food have been made, it is time for everyone else to eat and visit. Platters of food, from samosas to sweets fill the dining room table. The atmosphere is informal; this is a happy gathering of friends. In the basement, children and adults work on rangoli; geometric patterns of various colors. "We teach them rangoli, to decorate the floors," says one of the parents, "so that the Goddess of Earth will be pleased with it and wealth and good health will come into the house. So, all the girls learn. It's really mathematical. All the designs are. Rangoli, it means with colors."

As the evening ends, family and friends wish each other well, and return to their homes. For some, this is the end of the holiday. For others, there are more festivities ahead; visits to other friends' homes, or celebrating by dancing bhangra or garba, regional group dances from the Punjab and Gujerat. For all, the Diwali Festival will end soon, and it will be time to resume their lives in America.

Gulab Jamun and Samosas:

The Foods of Diwali



Lavanya Reddy and friends prepare samosas
(Photo by Joan Rabinowitz).

Gulab Jamun

1/2 lb. blanched almonds ground very fine
1/2 lb. sifted flour
5 fl. oz. yoghurt
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 lb. butter

Mix almonds and flour and work in the butter. Add baking powder, then work in the yoghurt. Let it rest for 15 minutes. Roll into 2-inch tubes and carefully deep fry. Remove when they have turned a rich reddish-brown. Place in prepared syrup for fifteen minutes and serve hot, or cool for eight hours and serve chilled. 1 pint light syrup (1/4 lb. sugar melted in 3/4 pint water)

Samosa

Makes 32-36.

Pastry:

1 1/2 cups plain flour

1/4 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon oil or ghee
1/2 cup warm water

Filling:

1 tablespoon oil or ghee
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh ginger
2 medium onions, finely chopped
2 teaspoons curry powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon vinegar or lemon juice
8 oz minced steak or lamb
1/2 cup hot water
1 teaspoon garam masala
2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint or coriander leaves
oil for frying

Pastry:

Sift flour and salt into a bowl, add oil and warm water and mix thoroughly, until ingredients are combined. (Add a little water if necessary to combine ingredients). Knead for about 10 minutes or until dough is elastic. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside while preparing filling.

Filling:

Heat ghee or oil in a saucepan and fry garlic, ginger and half the onion until onion is soft. Add curry powder, salt and vinegar, mix well. Add minced steak or lamb and fry over a high heat, stirring constantly until meat changes color. Turn heat down and add hot water. Cover pan and cook until meat is tender and all the liquid has been absorbed.

Towards the end of cooking, stir frequently to prevent meat from sticking to base of pan. Sprinkle with garam masala and chopped mint or coriander, remove from heat, and allow to cool. Mix in reserved chopped onion.

Take small pieces of dough, shape into balls and on a lightly floured board roll each one thinly to a circle, the size of a saucer. Cut each circle in half. Put a teaspoon of filling on one side of each half circle and brush edges with water. Fold dough over and press edges together firmly. You will now have triangular-shaped samosas.

When they are all made, heat oil in a deep pan and deep fry a few at a time until golden brown on both sides. Drain on absorbent paper and serve hot.

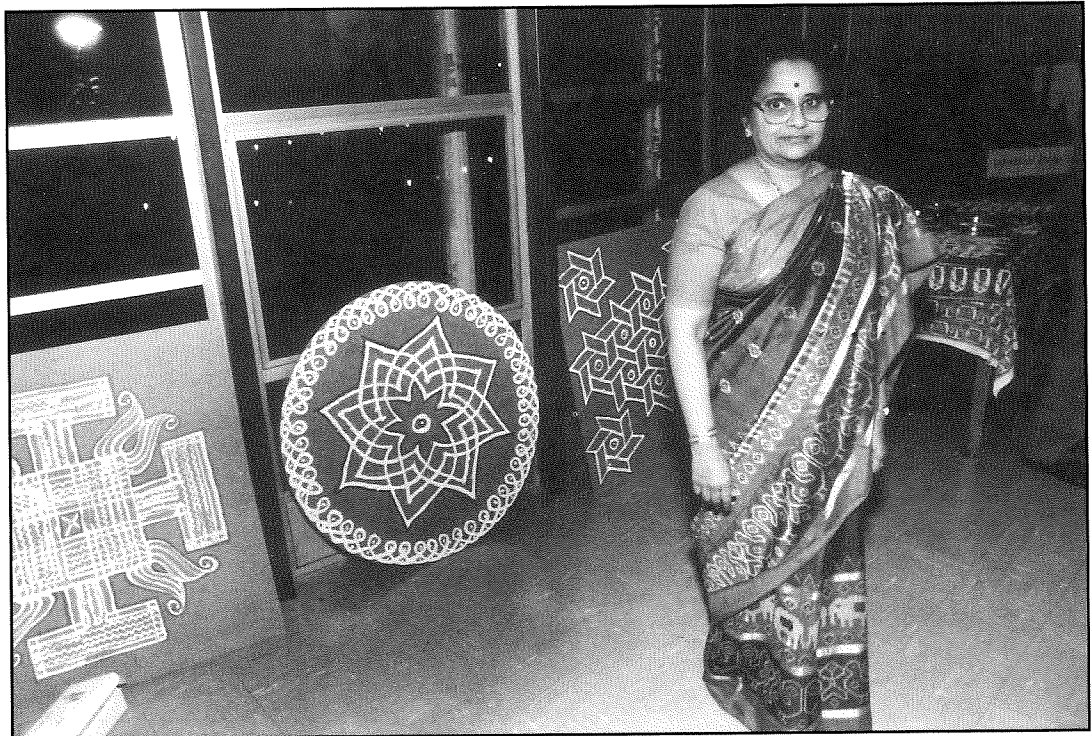
Henna and Rangoli: The Faces and Hands of Tradition

Interviews by Joan Rabinowitz

Henna painting

Pragna Shah stands at a table set up outside the auditorium where the Diwali performances are being held. She is preparing and applying henna.

"I am Pragna Shah. I work at Hazan High School. This is the henna painting. Henna is a plant. They dry the henna leaves, and grind into a powder. Then add the water and make a paste. And, use for the henna painting. You make a design in your hand. That is from every part of India, they make designs. They make the designs from simple to intricate.



Rajan Raman displays her Rangoli designs at a community-wide Diwali celebration (Photo by Dean Wong).



Pragna Shah does henna designs during a Diwali celebration (Photo by Peter Davenport).

We use this for every festival. It's not only for Diwali. For an auspicious festival, or a wedding, or a party. It's an ancient tradition.

This henna, it looks green. But, once it goes on the hand, from the body heat, it turns orange. And, if you leave it longer, it gets more and more color. It's really pretty, you know. Every woman likes to paint their hand and feet."

Pragna also has red and white paint that she uses to do face painting. "The bridal painting, we call it. Any festival time, little girls like to get their face painted. It is water soluble and you can clean it with water. I'm waiting for the little girls to come in."

RANGOLI: With Color

My name is Rajan Raman. I'm from Madras. I work for the University of Washington as a systems analyst.

I come from a very traditional family. In our family, for all the functions, they do this. I'm one among many brothers; I have more brothers than sisters. So, I'm the one trained to do these things. Whenever there is a function, this is my job to do



Pragna Shah's henna design (Photo by Peter Davenport).

"In Bombay, my neighbors who were Parsis, they used to have rangoli every day, but their rangoli was made not by hand. They had these special tin molds with holes in them. And they put sand and then they would bump the molds on the floor and then a little bit of sand would fall in a pattern and then they would create larger patterns with that. And for Diwali, everything within sight would be covered with rangoli,"
- Shantha Benegal

it. When I was growing up, everyday in the early morning, I used to get up and do it in front of my house.

There are authentic designs. One is for religious functions, or any ceremonies like that. It means "lotus of heart." It is your heart which you are giving, offering to god. We always put it in front of the prayer hall or where you are going to sit and pray. For Diwali, when we do the Puja, we put that "heart" one.

This is rice flour. You soak the rice, grind it, make a paste, and draw

with the paste, with one finger. Then it has to dry. Once it's dry, then you put the red border on it. That brings out the beauty of it. Plus, it's very auspicious to have a red border, for us. Red is very, very auspicious. The wedding sari is always red. And, all the decorations will have some sort of red. Next is green. Green is fertile, red is auspiciousness. Anything yellow means sacred.

You take this flour, and put dots first. I marked everything so it won't go crooked. It's just curves and

straight lines. If you know your geometry, maybe you can do it. You have to have control in your fingers, to put just enough to make a dot. Just enough to make that line. I'm rusty little bit now, I used to have better control than this.

In our country, for yellow we use tumeric. For red, tumeric and limestone. If you mix that, you will get the red color. And green. Any leaf, you can grind and make the green color. Here, I put the food color.

Performing Arts of India: Tradition Calls for Diversity

by Ramesh Gangolli

IF THERE IS ANY SINGLE WORD that captures India's essence it is diversity.

India is a country in which literally scores of cultures, hundreds of subcultures, and nearly a thousand tongues mingle in what sometimes feels like total chaos. This variety is also mirrored in its performance traditions. A common feature of all performance traditions is that they are all essentially oral and personal; that is, they are transmitted by one-on-one personal instruction, in which notated material is almost completely absent.

From ancient times, the performing arts in India have derived their inspiration from the three locations where performances take place - the temple, the court and the village festival. Temples served as venues for performances of devotional music. Songs composed by a number of devotional poets, some of whom are often referred to as poet-saints, were used as compositions for such performances. These songs have slowly become established as staples of classical vocal repertoire both in Hindustani (North Indian) and Karnatak (South Indian) music. The oldest form of Hindustani classical music, known as Dhrupad, has a repertoire based almost completely of such compositions and the entire repertoire of Karnatak music consists of such compositions even today.

Temples also often served as venues for performances of dance. Most of the prevalent classical forms of dance in India have their origins in the temple setting. Choreographed items are often conceived as invocations or tributes to the deity, and performed as acts of devotion. In rural India, the courtyard of the village temple was (and even today, continues to be) a social center, at



*A young dancer prepares to perform at a Diwali celebration
(Photo by Dean Wong).*

which various performances were staged.

Several folk genres, based on storytelling, ballad singing, mime or puppetry are prevalent in different parts of India. For instance, Ram-Lila (celebrating the acts of Rama, an epic god/hero) and Yakshagana (a dance drama form, in which folk tales, epics, and myths are interwoven). As is often the case, certain aspects of these folk genres are seen in the classical forms in use today, both in music and dance.

A second venue was the

courts of feudal kings or chieftains, or the salons of wealthy courtiers. Here the performance was oriented towards pure entertainment, for banquets, parties or other celebrations, and the setting encouraged the development of complex, highly refined genres, with themes that were more worldly. Poetic or sensuous interpretations, both in dance and music, gained prominence in this setting, and musical styles also evolved to suit a more light-hearted atmosphere. This source of inspiration was very important in the



Two dancers perform at Diwali celebration (Photo by Dean Wong).

development of certain fast rhythmic aspects of the Kathak dance form, for several types of compositions that are used in the dominant classical Hindustani vocal form known today as Khayal, or the lighter classical genres of Hindustani music such as Thumri.

The third source of inspiration was through participatory performances; such as group dancing or singing for which the context was typically a folk festival in which the entire village might participate. This context is also hospitable to different types of folk dances in various parts of India. The most



Dancers wait off stage to perform (Photo by Dean Wong).

popular are group dances known as Garba or Ras from Gujerat, and Bhangra from the Punjab. The former is a group dance form in which men and women dance in a circle, sometimes breaking up in smaller groups or pairs, and the recombining in a circle to resume a refrain. They use sticks that are clashed together rhythmically, and are accompanied by singers and other musicians. The Bhangra is a vigorous high stepping group dance form in which both men and women participate. The dances often take place at harvest festivals.

Towards the middle years of this century, profound changes began to occur in both the performance contexts of music and dance as well as the patterns of patronage, as societal forces such as urbanization and the growth of media made their impact felt. These changes accelerated after India became an independent nation, and today the performing arts are very prominent at secular venues such as city auditoria and music conferences. Performances of classical music and dance are common in cities, and are attended by sizable audiences, although these are still very small in comparison with audiences attracted by pop musicians.

Urbanization has made inaccessible



Dancers and actors get ready to perform at Diwali Festival celebration wait off stage to perform (Photo by Dean Wong).

one natural venue for informal musical performance, namely the village festival. However, urban communities have adjusted to the new conditions by organizing informal social assemblies usually in coincidence with festivals such as Diwali or Ganesh Chaturthi. During such gatherings, adults and children participate in performing many different kinds of music and dance - solo items, small ensemble work, or large group dances in which essentially everyone can participate.

The strategies that have developed in Indian cities to keep their heritage alive have an exact counterpart in the U.S. In Seattle, the East Indian community celebrates the Diwali festival towards the end of October, with many gatherings organized by regional sub-communities as well as with a large public gathering. Music and dance performances from different parts of India are presented by young and old. Childrens' participation is encouraged, so that by involving them they will acquire a sense of identity and continuity.

Various organizations devoted to the performing arts have taken root in the Puget Sound area, where the majority of Washington state's East Asian community lives, in an effort to preserve and present these traditions.

Ragamala, an all volunteer organization devoted to the performing arts of South Asia has been in existence for 15 years, and has presented musical and dance performances, mainly from India, but occasionally from other countries in South Asia whose musical cultures are cognate. By collaborating with a network of other arts

organizations in North America, Ragamala has been able to present a continuing series of high quality shows, featuring both top-notch established artists as well as younger performers at the threshold of a brilliant career. Another organization, the Music and Cultural Society of India, was formed about eight years ago, and has devoted itself to presenting performers of light music and popular styles. Their presentations have been very successful.

A third group that has done a lot for the propagation of these art forms is Leela, a small group of four or five performers, who conduct an enormous number of workshops, recitals, and lecture-demonstrations of dance and music. Over the last 12 years they have performed at diverse venues, such as community centers, schools throughout the state, senior centers, libraries and museums. The moving spirit behind this group was Prabha Rustagi, whose untimely death last year was felt as a great loss by the community (See Page 17). Prabha was also a fine dancer and dance teacher, whose legacy is now carried on by the remaining members of the group.

Prabha Rustagi: A Dancer of Tales

by Joan Rabinowitz

“YOU HAVE TO HEAR, THIS part, I’ll show you. You’ll be walking when she’s singing.” Seated on the floor, Prabha Rustagi played the tabla as she talked to her dance students, sometimes playing with only one hand as she used her other hand to demonstrate her point. Prabha regularly taught students from all over India and Fiji in her home. On this occasion, Prabha was preparing her students to perform Kathak dance for a Diwali celebration.

Many of her students have been with Prabha for years, starting as young as five years old. “In India, we learned at least six days a week,” Prabha explained. “If you compare it that way, it’s nothing here. But still, they have been here with me for a long time. So they have become quite good. Regularly I’m teaching once a week, but when we have something coming up like this, then on the weekend we just practice extra. I try to keep the younger kids together because they really, really enjoy it. I don’t want to make it too harsh on them, so they enjoy and they learn.”

Prabha began learning music and dance when she was a child in Khurja, an agricultural area in North India. “It’s a very small place,” Prabha explained, “but very rich in culture.”

“Maybe I was eight or nine when I started,” Prabha continued. “My mother started me on everything. Tabla, dance, and sitar. Vocal training, I kind of tried myself later on. For dance, it’s very important to know the rhythmic pattern, that’s



Prabha practices with her students (Photo by Nancy Donnelly).

why I learned tabla. I’m thankful to my mother. And maybe dance I just enjoyed. And since then, I have been doing it and, I love it, you know,” Prabha laughed and smiled.

“I’m from a very small place and socially it was not accepted, if any girl dances or plays tabla in public. Even now some people have said, ‘Oh, you are a lady. I didn’t know that Indian ladies play tabla in public.’ But my mother didn’t care. I

think she maybe wanted to be a musician, but she didn’t get a chance, so she gave me a chance to just learn. And it’s my hobby. I try. I’m not a musician or dancer, really,” Prabha laughed. “But, I love it.”

Prabha trained extensively in the North Indian classical dance tradition of Kathak. “Kathak means the storyteller. It started in the temples,” Prabha explained. “Story-



Prabha Rustagi, Shantha Benegal, Sharad Gadre prepare for Diwali (Photo by Nancy Donnelly).

tellers used to tell the stories of the gods and goddesses,” Shantha Benegal continued. “But when the Mughals came to India, some Kathaks moved to the Mughal courts. So, it developed in a different way as an entertainment. It became more virtuosic, too. Both aspects are there in Kathak now. So, Prabha will usually do something that begins with devotional music, which relates it to its temple beginnings. And then she would do pure dance, which is more virtuosic.”

Singer Shantha Benegal has been performing with Prabha for many years in a music group called Leela. “Kathak is a kind of interactive dance form,” Shantha explained. “You cannot really perform Kathak to taped music. You have to have live music because you keep adjusting to one another.”

“What happens with taped music,” Prabha continued. “Suppose the tape is going on, and if you miss something, it’s gone. But we have eye contact. Like, if I’m dancing, Shantha will just look at me and keep on singing. And sometimes I

know she is going to sing. I can keep on doing it, knowing what is going to come next.”

“We don’t often know how big the stage is going to be,” Shantha went on. “So, maybe I have to sing one line ten times instead of six times, or maybe I have to have one expression more emotive than another, or something like that. You never know until you are on the stage and you have to adapt your performance as you go along. That’s why we find it so important to have live music rather than tape.”

“Only live music can teach you that. Tape, you’re fixed,” Prabha continued. “I think that’s a good way of learning, because then you learn to adjust, whatever is coming next. And already the students are also learning. Previously they used to get nervous. ‘Oh, we know Shantha! She might do something more, and we have to keep on doing it!’ So they’re learning. It’s a big learning experience,” Prabha laughed.

“Children have very good memories,” Shantha said. “They will suddenly look at me and say, ‘Hey,

you sang that one time less!’ (laughing). It’s funny. But now they have learned to adjust. I think that is an important lesson, that you can’t always have a fixed way of - there is improvisation in this, you know, and that’s the fun of it. It’s not just doing something that is fixed. A lot of it is rehearsed, but in performance, things change and you have to adjust. We keep improvising as we go along. And as you practice more, you can improvise more.”

“You want to go through one more time?,” Prabha asked her students. “No, that’s too late. Go back. Right there. We’ll do the last part again...”

Prabha Rustagi died on December 13, 1994 after performing one month earlier in her last Diwali festival. She is deeply missed by the community.

“I have known Prabha for nearly twenty years, and have been privileged to work with her in a number of different ways. Over that period, I have seen a truly marvelous unfolding of her role as a performer, teacher, tradition bearer and community service volunteer. These varied facets of her activity have enriched the lives of a large number of people, and her contributions have reached a stage of maturity and impact that needs to be acknowledged at the highest level... She is a remarkable individual, with great personal resources and a true commitment to enriching the lives of others. By honoring individuals such as her, we rejoice in the capacity of human beings for versatility and celebrate the generosity of the human spirit.”

***- Ramesh Gangolli,
President of Ragamala,
January 8, 1994***

Resource Guide:

Indian Cultural and Community Organizations

Bazm-e-Adab Urdu

218 NE 17th St.

Seattle, WA 98155

A literary society promoting Urdu language and culture. Members include poets and literateurs from Pakistan and India.

India Association of Western Washington

PO Box 404

Bellevue, WA 98009-0404

(206) 489-0510

This group's goals are to provide a common identity for the Indian community; to provide a forum for the advancement and appreciation of the performing arts; to promote social, cultural, and educational programs; and to enhance mutual understanding between the Indian and the U.S. communities.

East Asian Studies

David Bachman, Director

Mary Bernson, Associate Director

301 Thomson Hall

Jackson School of International Studies

University of Washington

Seattle, WA 98195

(206) 543-1921

Leela

21805 Old Owen Road

Monroe, WA 98272

(206) 794-4925

Contact: Annie Penta

Annie Penta and Shantha Benegal teach music and dance of India, and introduce the culture through textile arts and stories.

Music and Cultural Society of India

4505 NE 86th St.

Seattle, WA 98115

(206) 525-5380

Contact: Dr. Suhail Hamad, President

A nonreligious, nonpolitical organization dedicated to educating about and promoting the culture of the Indian subcontinent and surrounding countries.

People for Progress in India

PO Box 51231

Seattle, WA 98115-1213

Self-reliance for rural Indians; education, health care, vocational training, small-scale industries, migrant worker child care; and a drug abuse program.

Ragamala

4624 NE 89th St.

Seattle, WA 98115

(206) 525-7728

Contact: Shanta Gangolli

An organization that sponsors performances of music and dance from India, Pakistan, Nepal, and South Asia.

Southeast Asian Studies

John Butler, Director

Maureen Jackson, Associate Director

303 Thomson Hall

Jackson School of International Studies

Box 353650

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Seattle, WA 98195

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Asian Festivals of Washington State:

Diwali Bibliography

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(206) 634-0919
e-mail: joan@sonarchy.org

Ethnic Heritage Council
305 Harrison St., Suite 326
Seattle, WA 98109
(206) 443-1410

Washington State Arts Commission
234 E. Eighth St.
Olympia, WA 98504
(360) 753-3860