

Diwali and New Year celebrated at BAPS Mandir

SANDIP PATEL



BAPS fireworks during Diwali



Visitors during New Year celebrations at BAPS

CHICAGO: People of all ages professing Hindu religion across the world flock to Mandir and religious for darshan and pray for both forgiveness and success in the coming year during the festival of Diwali and New Year. People illuminate their homes with colorful lights, wear new and traditional clothes, share sweets and send well wishes to family and friends.

The scene was no different at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bartlett IL; buzzing with joy and excitement all week.

"Diwali is a festival to be aware of the inner light of God, and once we understand this, we will experience joy in every moment of our lives," said Pujya Vivekmurti Swami explaining the spiritual significance of Diwali.

On the night of Diwali, a vast array of colorful fireworks lit up the night sky in Bartlett where the BAPS temple is located. Thursday, October 27, marked the culmination of weeks of planning and preparation, setting the stage for the most significant ritual of the Diwali events, 'Annakut'. Annakut, which literally means 'a mountain of food', is traditionally offered

to God to celebrate the beginning of the Hindu New Year.

"The preparation begins very early in



BAPS Annakut

the morning for us," explained Shashi Brahambhatt of the BAPS youth wing. "The vegetarian food is traditionally arranged in

tiers or steps in front of the Murtis of God. The sweets are placed nearest. As the tiers descend, other foods such as vegetables,

1000 food items have been offered to God."

Devotees arrived early in the morning dressed in new shervanis and colorful saris to receive blessings. The first aarti of the New Year was performed at 6 am.

Diwali is also a time when children look forward to the celebrations. On October 15, the Children's Diwali celebration was held and proved to be as fun as it was educational. The children learned the history and origins of this festival, played a variety of exciting games, ate great food, saw spectacular fireworks, and were given many different gifts and prizes.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a worldwide socio-spiritual organization, is dedicated to community service, peace and harmony. Motivated by Hindu principles, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. Its 3,300 international centers support these activities of character-building. Under the guidance and leadership of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS aspires to build a community that is morally, ethically and spiritually pure, and free of addictions.

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pulses and fried savories are arranged. A mound of cooked rice, symbolic of Mt. Govardhan, is placed in the center. Today over

Chandrika Tandon concert to support Vedic Pandits

GREG JAMES



John Hagelin, Ph.D., addressing the meet



Ramani Ayer, Director of Global Peace Initiative

MAHARISHI VEDIC CITY, Iowa: Leaders of the Global Peace Initiative hosted a Vedic Visitors Weekend, November 4 to 6 at Maharishi Vedic City in southeast Iowa, attracting Indo-Americans

from cities as far away as Los Angeles and New York.

The participants assembled to experience a weekend devoted to peace and all things Vedic: Vedic education, Vedic health, Vedic ag-

riculture, and Vedic architecture.

The weekend culminated with Grammy-nominated world music artist, Chandrika Tandon, performing a stunning sold-out benefit concert at the Stephen Sondheim Theatre.

"The combination of different instruments and Chandrika's voice revealed to me what World Music should be all about," said Vinod Nayagar, a university student who attended the concert.

Ramani Ayer, retired CEO of the Hartford Financial Group and current Director of Development for the Global Peace Initiative, who served as a host of the weekend, said, "We invited Indo-Americans from around country to experience how powerful, valuable and rel-



Chandrika Tandon

evant the practical application of ancient Vedic wisdom, as developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi,

is to our daily lives and to the improvement of society."

MAFS fundraiser: A grand affair



Fashion show at MAFS meet

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The highlight of the evening was the fusion dance by Northwestern University, Acapella group which belted out zestful Bollywood numbers that elicited prolonged applause from the audience.

'Around the World', the fusion dance by Northwestern University and a dance by University of Illinois Bhangra Group were the other attractions of the evening.

Another presentation that clearly dominated the evening was a fashion show by Trupti Kuwaria. The evening also had a ceremony in which awards were presented to invited dignitaries and MAFS staff. Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Sheila Dikshit, CM of Delhi, Leadership Award was given to Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Ex-CM of Rajasthan, Public Service Award to Raghunaath V Deshpandey, Karnataka Congress president, Excellence Service Award to Amrish Singh Gautam, Outstanding Achievement Award to Ranjeet Deshmukh and Distinguished Service Award to Vimal Vyas.

The other awards presented were Appreciation Award given to Michael Gelder, Public Service Award given to Sam Pitroda, Media Award to Prashant Shah, publisher of India Tribune, Management award was given to Prem

Jalota, Employee of the year award was given to Hariyadan Patel, Supervisor of the year award was given to Saba Kazi, Public Relation Award was given to Himali Bharucha, 10 years Homecare Aides award was presented to Begum Shakeela, Homecare Aide of the year given to Najma Deriwala, Driver of the year was given to Nisar M. Ghogha, Adult Daycare Service

Another presentation that clearly dominated the evening was a fashion show by Trupti Kuwaria

award was given to Pankaj Patel, Food Service award was given to Gulshan Mirza, Volunteer Award was given to Gulshan Gowder and the Kitchen Helper of the year award was given to Tayyaba Bodhari.

Melodious musical selections of Indira Naik, Ghazal and Sufi singer, enthralled the audience. She mesmerized attendees with her soul-stirring ghazals and Bollywood numbers.

The event was compered by Beena Patel and vote of thanks was presented by Rakesh Asthana, Chairman of the event.



Guests from India and Chicagoland

Chandrika Tandon concert to support Vedic Pandits

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Fred Travis, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Brain, Consciousness, and Cognition at Maharishi University of Management in neighboring Fairfield, had his scientific presentation during the weekend on the effects of Transcendental Meditation on brain functioning was highlighted by slides and graphics illustrating the beneficial changes that occur as a result of regular TM practice.

From EEG signatures and connectivity maps, Dr. Travis showed how different meditation practices impact different parts of the brain. "Most meditations fall into two categories," Dr. Travis said.

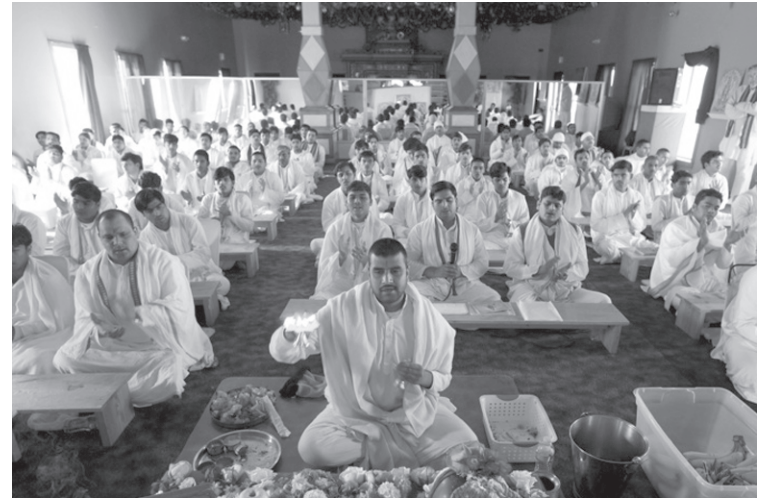
"First are 'focused attention' techniques, which require you to concentrate on an object, or a particular word or phrase. The second are 'open monitoring' techniques, which involve being mindful of your thoughts or breath without interfering with them. This approach attempts to still the mind and become an uninvolved witness to activity. But these attempts are on the surface level of the mind," he said.

Dr. Travis then identified a third category - "automatic self-transcending" - a process that allows the mind to transcend its own activity. "This is the Transcendental Meditation technique, during which the mind transcends effortlessly, and arrives at the depth of consciousness, the source of the thinking mind, transcendental consciousness, or Samadhi," Dr. Travis said.

Dr. Travis said that after several months of TM practice, the brain begins to demonstrate increased connectivity, even outside of meditation. "The brain functions more holistically, which accounts for the meditating student's improved academic achievement. The student is able to absorb, integrate, and express knowledge more effectively," Dr. Travis said.

Dr. G.V. Naidu, who traveled from St. Louis to attend the conference, said, "The scientific documentation of 'The Neurophysiology of Enlightenment' by Dr. Travis was impressive. And a subsequent presentation by physicist Dr. John Hagelin was a climax of the conference."

John Hagelin, Ph.D., a Harvard-trained, internationally renowned quantum physicist, provided the modern scientific understanding and corroborating scientific research documenting how groups



Vedic Pandits performing Rudra Abhishek

of experts in the Transcendental Meditation and advanced TM-Sidhi program can neutralize violence and conflict and create world peace.

"Extensive research published in peer-reviewed scientific journals verifies that Transcendental Meditation dramatically reduces acute individual stress and its deleterious effects on brain and behavior far more effectively than other methods," Dr. Hagelin said.

"But perhaps more interesting and important are the 23 published studies which show that relatively small numbers of people practicing the Transcendental

Pandits in India and 1250 Vedic Pandits in the United States - the number established by research that is sufficient to create a concrete and demonstrative positive global effect.

"The Vedic Pandits' daily practice of the TM and TM-Sidhi program establishes their consciousness in Yoga, the pure field of intelligence, at the basis of all creation. And their Vedic recitation from that deep and pure level creates a powerful influence of peace for humanity. This perfect combination of Yoga and Yagya will help create a much higher quality of life for the whole world's population," Ayer said.

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Meditation and TM-Sidhi program together in a group can reduce crime, violence, and war throughout the entire population," he said.

Citing studies conducted in the Middle East showing reductions in war death and violence by 70 percent, Dr. Hagelin said, "There is no approach to peace that has been so thoroughly tested and rigorously established.

And now, since the arrival in America five years ago of the large group of Vedic Pandits, there has been a significant decrease in violent crime in America's largest cities. We are mobilizing to add more numbers to the group, to create an even more positive effect in America."

Ayer provided a vision of the goal of the Global Peace Initiative: To maintain permanent peace-keeping groups of 9000 Vedic

The Global Peace Initiative is building an endowment fund to create and maintain these large groups of Vedic Pandits in perpetuity.

Another sublime highlight of the weekend was the performance by 121 Maharishi Vedic Pandits of Rudrabhishek.

Mohan Pillai from Long Island, New York, who attended the conference with his family, said, "I cannot describe in words what it was like to hear such a powerful chanting of the Rudrabhishekam. The inner feeling was so good that I could understand how such large groups of well-trained Vedic Pandits can create peace."

Ayer concluded: "As Indians who cherish the Vedic tradition in our hearts, we should feel very proud that this great knowledge has given us a practical means to create peace in the world."