



## Holi Mahotsav 2006

On Saturday April 1 and Sunday April 2, Tumbalong Park at Darling Harbour came alive with the vibrant colours, inspiring melodies, rhythmic beats and spicy tastes of the South Asian communities of Sydney. This weekend marked the fourth consecutive year of the Holi Mahotsav the grand Indian festival of colours, harmony and friendship celebrated with gaiety, cultural diversity and vibrancy.



*"The Indian Australian community has been a vital part in building Australia's cultural diversity. It is the work of organisations such as Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan that allows us to embrace multiculturalism in a uniquely Australian way"*

Hon John Howard MP  
Prime Minister, Australia

Over the years Bhavan Australia has overseen the development of this vast multicultural Sydney event with awe and reverence. President of Bhavan Australia Mr Gambhir Watts has carefully navigated the growth of this event, a massive undertaking which now commands great support from an army of community volunteers, sponsors and government agencies.

This year the festival also added to Sydney's famous calendar of street parades. The Holi Mahotsav 2006 Parade

commenced at the Archibald Fountain at Hyde Park, and included two artistic and exotic floats. The first float was the "Rath Yatra" chariot organised by ISKCON Sydney. The journey of the chariot represents the symbolic annual journey of Lord Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) to his birthplace, whilst accompanied by devotees. The second float was a colourful and classy float promoting India Tourism. Presented in true 'Incredible India' style, the float inspired Sydney-siders to imagine what awaits them should they join the growing numbers of Australians visiting India! As Mr Shankar Dhar, Regional Director of India Tourism said "Events such as Bhavan Australia's Holi festival reach out to the wider community and generate greater awareness and interest in India, its age old traditions and the unity in its amazing diversity. Such events encourage growing people to people links and India Tourism is proud to be a part of it."

As the floats moved into St James Road a crowd of men, women and children dressed in colourful outfits and colourful smiles, joined them to accompany the floats through the city. The parade moved left into Elizabeth Road, right into Market St and left onto George St. After a short pause in front of Sydney's best icon Town Hall building the procession turned right at Liverpool St and finally entered into Darling Harbour. As it turned and twisted its way through the usually busy streets of Sydney, this parade of floats with a cacophony of colours, hypnotic chants and dancing bodies left many pedestrians suitably joyous, curious, confused, happy, elated and very interested.

*"Your Festival this year is further evidence of the excellent work done by Bhavan Australia and highlights its dedication to the cause of harmony, peace and understanding between the two nations"*

Hon Kim Beazley MP  
Leader of the Opposition

With the parade, came the two-day festival of colours. Community leaders from all walks of life were present at the event starting with Mr Max Eulo, Aboriginal elder who performed a smoke ceremony at Archibald Fountain to launch the inaugural street parade and Hon. Laurie Ferguson, Federal Member for Reid, Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs and Harmohan Singh Walia, Sikh Community Leader who delivered a short address on Saturday.

## Holi Mahotsav 2006

in partnership with

**Incredible India**





Mr Gambhir Watts, President of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan welcomed leaders at the Bhavan VIP session on Sunday including: Mr Shanker Dhar, Regional Director Australasia, India Tourism (the major sponsor of the festival since its inception); His Grace Atmaram Prabhu, President ISKCON Sydney and Adelaide (the key partner in the street parade); Hon. Sujan Chinoy, Consul General of India Sydney; Hon. Paul Gibson MP Blacktown, representing the New South Wales Premier Hon Morris Iemma; Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian, Chair Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales, Dr S Balasubramanian, president Hindu Council of Australia, Ms Josie Lacey, Vice Chair Australian Jewery representing the Jewish community, Ms Jackie Menzies, Head Curator, Asian Art Gallery, Art Gallery of NSW and others.



Messages of support were received from Prime Minister John Howard, who forwarded his best wishes to all attending. "It is the work of organisations such as Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan that allows us to embrace multiculturalism in a uniquely Australian way". Hon Kim Beazley commented that the festival allows Australians to learn about Vedic cultural heritage "in an atmosphere of happiness and enjoyment" and forwarded his best wishes to all participants. Premier Hon Morris Iemma congratulated organisers and participants "for staging this exciting event" and offered best wishes to all attending for a wonderful Holi. NSW Opposition leader Mr Peter Debnam said all Australians are proud that Sydney plays host to one of Bhavan's seven international centres and extended his warmest wishes to the staff, participants and attendees of Holi Mahotsav. High Commissioner of India HE Mr Prabhat Shukla wished the programme all success - "Holi is an important festival in India and is an occasion for promotion of social interaction and harmony" - while the Consul General of India conveyed his warmest wishes for Holi Mahotsav 2006 - "a colourful festival that is marked with great feeling for one and all, thus transcending its socio-cultural and religious origins to unite diverse sections of society". In his message, Chair of the NSW Community Relations Commission Stepan Kerkyasharian said "The unique celebration of Holi which features the joyful and somewhat mischievous throwing of colour brings something very new to our cultural scene. The mainstream press has now recognised that more and more the people of Sydney can taste the world's great cultures without leaving home, enjoying our wonderful mix of festivals happening through the year."



*"I commend Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for extending the hand of peace and friendship, while also providing Sydneysiders with an opportunity to experience the broad range of Indian culture and spirituality"*

Hon Morris Iemma MP  
Premier, NSW



*"The event is a wonderful celebration of the values Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan holds close namely love and harmony"*

Peter Debnam MP  
NSW Liberal Leader

Messages were also received from Vishwaguru Mahamandaleshwar Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda - "The festival of Holi shall remind us to awake and cultivate positive, spiritual and merciful thoughts" - and Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati who contributed a short poem, closing with these lines "...On the morning of Holi, The other colours will wash

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away, But we must let the colour of god be indelible, In our eyes, in our ears and in our hearts.”

Holi Mahotsav 2006’s cultural performances featured traditional classical dance styles, folk dances, traditional music, and modern Bollywood bands and music.

Bhavan Australia’s Cultural Director Mr Avijit Sarkar aptly said “the performing and fine arts have no language yet these mediums remain the most potent tools for assimilation of cultures and countries. They are also the most powerful mediums for peace and happiness.”

Happiness was certainly the message of the entertainment medium during Holi, and it was



*“Holi Mahotsav is relatively new to Sydney but already it has become a fascinating and fun filled event in the centre of the city that exposes the people of Sydney, and passing tourists alike, to an ancient popular festival”*

Stepan Kerkyasharian  
Community Relations Commission

in vogue with all performers  
 ... The joy of ISKCON singers as they performed Jaggannath Aarti in front of the beautifully crafted and colourfully decorated mobile Temple Marquee  
 ...The happiness of the audience as they watched daughters, sons, friends and family enact old and new stories through Folk, Classical and Bollywood dances  
 ...The satisfaction and pride of performance organisers, most of whom passionately trained performers in South Asian cultural heritage.

*“The Holi Festival holds a special place in Darling Harbour’s annual calendar. It provides the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority with a wonderful opportunity to increase the vibrancy and diversity of the precinct”*

Dr Robert Lang, CEO  
Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority

...The laughter and chuckles from the audience at young Shourya Nidhi’s recital of famous Indo-Canadian comedian Russell Peters’ hilarious jokes  
 ...The peaceful vibe that comes from connecting with an age-old science, as Mr Siddarth Iyer delivered yoga instruction  
 ...The honour for Sydneysiders as the son of one of India’s great singing families, Mr Ghulam Abbas, serenaded us at Tumbalong Park

*“Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has been playing a leading role in bringing the Indian Community together through the celebration of various festivals and organization of other event”*

Hon P.P. Shukla  
High Commissioner of India in Australia

... The funky youthfulness of Mr Sanjay Raina, who had the audience dancing at his feet. The Raja of Remixes, Sanjay, even had me on the dancefloor as he pumped out the vocals of “Rang de Basanti”, exciting the audience with aspirations for India and the potential of its youth.

mixes and immediately to spiritual music (in this case ISKCON’s religious “Hare Krishna Hare Rama”) without losing a beat.

Who can forget the joy of the lone dancer in the audience, who boldly danced solo beside the

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stage to Raj Batra's songs on Saturday morning braving the staid faces of an early morning audience?

...Or the widespread community support for Vision Asia's Boogie Woogie competition finalists – we wish them well as they represent Australia



...The pride we shared as a mature South Asian community, as Bhavan Australia took the lead in recognising and awarding many young South Asian Aussie cricketers who have already lived the dreams of many sporting youngsters by representing NSW and Australia

...The contentment derived from showing respect, as Bhavan Australia launched its



Senior's Program and honoured Mr Sid Verma (who is actively involved in business at age 97+, and holds a current driver's licence) and Dr Nana Badve, a distinguished community elder. Those who entered the popular 'colour throwing pit', and were streaked with coloured powder, will certainly remember making merry at Holi! With thanks to Mr and Mrs Bhojwani, long-time supporters of Holi through the provision of coloured powder.



*"..Holi is a colourful festival that is marked with great warmth of feeling for one and all, thus transcending its socio-cultural and religious origins to unite diverse sections of society"*

Hon Sujan Chinoy  
Consul General of India, Sydney



Happiness and Harmony was certainly the message of the

...The cultural bonfire (Havan) celebrating the victory of good intent over bad; ...SBS Radio and Television which interviewed Ms Moksha Watts for her personal take on Holi; ...manicures at the NAB Chill Zone; ...Hindi television viewing at the Vision Asia Movie House; ... delicious vegetarian food from famous Sydney restaurants ...a great variety of drink stalls; ...merchandise stalls with beautiful traditional saris and jewellery...

festival.

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Shankar Dhar  
India Tourism, Sydney

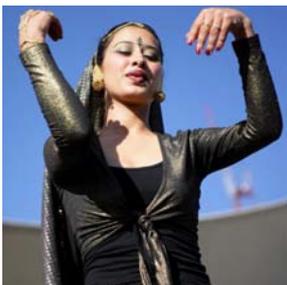


What a fantastic family weekend and all colourfully captured by official photographer Mr Don Arnold and official video shooter Mr Arvind Shukla.

Despite the extension of Holi to a two-day event this year, covering both Saturday and Sunday, crowds remained strong through to the very close of the festival. In fact the setting of the sun on Sunday seemed to force proceedings to a close, rather than the formal end of performances!

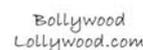
*"..we recognise the valuable contribution made by different communities in ensuring that we as a multi-cultural Australia continue to grow and progress together"*

Gambhir Watts  
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Australia



Widespread community support for the festival was evident in the support shown by tens of thousands of Sydneysiders who chose to celebrate this unique Antipodean Holi with great enthusiasm, bringing family and friends to enjoy and partake

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in the spectacle.

Well, why would they not? Holi festival is set in Darling Harbour, at Tumbalong Park, a fabulous venue situated in the heart of the city and its tourist district. Mr Robert Lang, CEO of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority described the venue as one which well suits Holi, the festival of colours as the venue “shines with the distinct colours of Sydney: the brilliant blue of the harbour; the glistening sun; sailing boats and harbour ferries, capped by the stunning lights of one of the most vibrant cities in the world”.



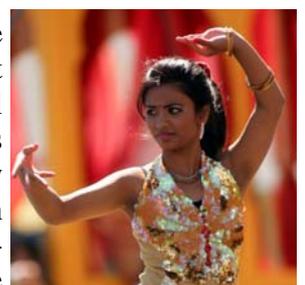
More importantly, Holi festival gives South Asian families and communities an opportunity to recreate the public life familiar to those communities, and also share the tradition with all other Australians.



Indian festivals and celebrations (or feasts) are world-renown for their variety and vigour. They are known to be as extreme in merriment, as India’s religious solemnity and sincere practices of meditation (fasts) are extreme in their sobriety.



As an Indian Australian who was raised here, I have witnessed the creation of large scale Indian-inspired celebratory events over the past few years such as Bhavan Australia’s ambitious large multicultural events and the Australia India Business Council’s large business events. I wonder, how do we - as a large community drawn originally from a continent with the geographic size and diversity of Western Europe - choose from the infinite opportunities available to us when recreating South Asian celebrations in Australia? The answer must be that we choose celebrations that are relevant to our communities in Australia today.



The Holi Festival, due to its symbolism, is one of the best events for the South Asian community to celebrate with each other and share with other Australians.

- Public celebration of the belief that good and pure intentions triumph over bad intentions, is a great belief to reinforce in a multicultural community



- The shedding of inhibitions and throwing colour over strangers and elders during Holi, reflects Australia’s year-round tradition of irreverence!

- Finally, celebrating the Holi Spring festival in Autumn, brings Australia’s South Asian community in line with earlier European migrants who introduced and celebrated Winter festivals such as Xmas, in the heart of Summer!



## Media





Holi Mahotsav 2006 was a superbly organised event, which owes its success to the vision of organisers Bhavan Australia, sponsors Incredible India and Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, and the passionate participation of Sydney's South Asian communities and community supporters such as ISKCON – all of whom came out in great numbers to volunteer, entertain, share food, drink and merchandise, and participate widely through having fun.



If you missed out on Holi this year, try and make it to Holi 2007 at Tumbalong Park on 31 March and 1 April!



**Throughout the day, the audience had the pleasure of viewing colourful performances from diverse community groups, including:** Live Orchestra (Avijit Sarkar with Jazba); Bhangra and Bollywood youth performances (organised by Mala Mehta); dances to the latest Bollywood songs (Priya Dewan, Shona Narayan and Charunie Edirisinghe); the Ghwazi Caravan tribal bellydance (Steven Burrow, Cathy O'Brien, Katie O'Brien, Lenore Davi, Lorraine Warburton, Lara Bucknell, April & Sandy Burrow); a fusion of folk, classical and mystic styles in a performance expressing the feelings of young women (Priya K, Nidhi, Karishma, Crion and Tanzeena); modern dance (Lipica Tiwari, Nupur and Kriti); fashion show by Sareeonline.com; a fusion of Odissi, Kathak, Bharat Natyam and Kuchipudi (Bhavanesswaari Manugaran, Manugaran, Baldeep Kaur & Thilakavathi Chengodu); Bollywood Hip-Hop performances by (Chris Barkat & Waqas Aslam); Kathak and Dandiya performances (Ruchi Sanghi); a 'dance' competition between modern and traditional Bollywood dances (Sunali, Bhandula, Divya Abraham, Naeha Sara, Kanijji, Meenal); Bharatnatyam dance by (Vrinda Ravi); performance to Rabindranath Tagore's "Momo Chitte" (Shruti Bose, Radhika Biswas, Sudarshana Bose, Anahita Parikh, Debjani Pal, Ankita Saha, Ria Sinha and Eva Sinha), Avaya Prada, Modern Jazz, Surya Pranam and Krishna dances (Sharmila Maitra group), Bengali group dances (organised by Bengali Association, Rilli); Semi-classical and modern fusion (Majusha group), Gujarati Dandiya Raas and Thali Raas (Swaminarayan Group including Manju Patel, Laxmi Vekaria, Laliben Vekaria, Dhani Vekaria, Manjula Vaghjiani, Shruti Rajani, Sangita Vaghjiani, Bharti Rabadia, Ramila Kerai, Rasila Hirani & Sunita Hirani); Aboriginal Welcome Dance (Nujjagoori); Bollywood dancing (Mango Dance, Farah Shah); Choir, group and solo performances (Bangladesh soc. for Puja & Culture Inc - Nirmal Chowdury, Auntora Chowdhury, Sarmistha Sarkar, Arjun Sarkar, Sapla Misty Paul, Pritha Barai, Chitra Das, Anonya Bhattacharya and Mousumi Saha).

**MCs** - Aishveryaa Nidhi, Amit Grover, Divya Raghavan, Swati Kapila and Patrick Skene (MC for Youth Awards).

**Stage Managers and Volunteers** - Utkarsh Doshi; Neetu Nebhani; Bhoji Watts Reena Doshi Manju Chand Shantha Vishwanathan Nayana Purohit and Nitin Kumar. Security Manager Kumar Kondepudi.