

KUMBHA MELA The Fantastic Bathing Fair



The Kumbha Mela is the largest congregation of people in India. Celebrated once in four years, at four different places on the banks of holy rivers, the festivities include ritual bath sand sacrifices.

Literally kumbha means 'pot' and mela is 'a fair'. This religious fair is the biggest and the most important gathering for Hindus since time immemorial. It occurs in a 12-year cycle at each of these places – at Haridvar in Uttar Pradesh on the banks of the river Ganga; at Prayaga near Allahabad, also in Uttar Pradesh, at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati rivers; at Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, on the banks of the river Shipra; and at Nasik in Maharashtra on the Godavari River. The fair at Prayag is the biggest and considered the most virtuous.

It is popularly believed that a ritual bath at the Kumbha Mela confers extraordinary merit upon the bather, not only by cleansing him of his sins but also by helping him achieve salvation. A large number of devotees from all walks of life congregate to participate in mass yagyas here. The aim of all devotees is the same: Moksha,

i.e. liberation from this cycle of birth and death, and the attainment of salvation. Holy baths are undertaken at different times during the four Kumbha Melas, chiefly on the new moon and the full moon day.

Historical evidence indicates that in the centuries past, these fairs were the scenes of bloody battles, chiefly between the militant sections of rival orders of Hindu monks. The main object of contention in these battles, which occurred as recently as 1807, was the right to bathe in the most auspicious place at the most powerful instant. The conflicts were so fierce that indigenous and British courts finally had to establish and enforce specific bathing orders at the various sites of the Kumbha Mela.

Apart from being a pilgrimage at which sins can be cleansed and merit gained, the fair is also the ground for many religious assemblies and discourses.



Today, many of those who attend Kumbha Mela have a specific gain in mind: a job, a child, or success in studies. The special power of the Kumbha Mela is often said to be due in part to the presence of a large number of Hindu monks, and many pilgrims seek darshan of these holy men. Others listen to religious discourses, participate in devotional singing, engage Brahmin priests for personal rituals, organise mass feedings of monks or the poor, or merely enjoy the celebrations. Amid this diversity of activities, the ritual bath at the conjunction of time and place is the central event of any Kumbha Mela.

The fair is attractive, even to tourists and the less devout. Many stalls and shops are set up for the duration of the fair. The huge influx of people from all over, the smell of incense and burning sandalwood, saints in saffron robes, all this presents a picturesque scene.

Although the word kumbha finds mention both in the Vedic and Puranic texts, there is no clear evidence regarding its origin. The Vedic hymns merely indicate the spiritual implications of the kumbha. In the

Contd.

Cultural Calendar for January 2008

January 8

Hindustani Vocal Music Recital
by Prof. Vidya Prasad Mishra, Alahabad
University, India
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

January 10

A programme to mark the World Hindi Day
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

January 12

Rangoli Mela- Rangoli competition to mark the
Thaipongal festival
Venue & Time: ICC 9.30 a.m.

January 16

Film : The Making of a Nation Part 1 – 5
(English)
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 2hrs
17 mins

January 23

Film : The Making of a Nation Part 6 – 10
(English)
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 2hrs
15 mins

(Admission to all programmes is free and on first come first served basis)



Puranas, the kumbha has been mentioned as a holy place for the performance of death rites, a place on the bank of the Sarasvati, where a holy bath is believed to bestow the benefit of yagya performance. The kumbha of the Vedas thus represents spirituality, and that of the Puranas, benefits from the ritual baths.

According to some scholars, the Kumbha Mela is reminiscent of the Vedic way of celebrating festivals. In fact, it is probably the only remnant

of Vedic celebrations, which included mass yagyas, prayers, oblations, feasts for the gods and friends in thanksgiving, and to further underline the fact that in joy as well as in sorrow, all people should be unified.

According to a legend related to its origin, the gods and the demons had concluded a temporary alliance for the "Samudra Manthan". Both sides agreed to divide equally all the treasures that emerged from the ocean. After many years of churning, Dhanvantari, emerged carrying the pot of Amrita. He handed over the pot to Indra. The gods, in spite of their pact, were unwilling to share it with the demons. So, Vishnu in the form of Mohini, a beautiful enchantress, distracted the demons, while the gods sipped the Amrita. When the demons realized what was happening, they attacked the gods. They fought for 12 human years. During the battle, a few drops from the pot fell at four places on the earth - Haridvar, Prayaga, Ujjain, and Nasik. Therefore the fair is celebrated at these four places during special astrological arrangements.

Source: India Festiva CD Rom

SANDESH

The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo

Rhythm of life by Kanu Desai

January 2008

ICC wishes
a very happy
New Year to all



ICCR

Performance by renowned
Manipuri dancer Padmashree
Ratan Thiyam and his troupe

Indian Cultural Centre

133, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 4, Sri Lanka
Telephone: 2500014, Fax: 2598674
E-mail: icc@sitnet.lk
ICCR Website: www.iccrindia.org

Past Events

17th November
Painting, Drawing and Essay Competition for children to commemorate Birth Anniversary of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru



The Indian Cultural Centre celebrated children's day, which falls on November 14 coinciding with the birthday of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, by hosting a painting, drawing and essay writing competition for children on 17th November. Around 320 children from all over the Island participated in this competition. Boys and girls between the age groups of three and fifteen drew and painted colourful pictures on a wide variety of themes using their imagination. It was interesting to see such enthusiasm among the children. At the end of the day each participant was awarded a certificate of participation. All entries completed at the Centre were sent to India to be judged in the Shankar's International Competition 2008.

20th November
Hindustani vocal music recital by Sangeet Shasthrapathi Thilini Priyankari Rodrigo



Ms. Thilini Priyankari Rodrigo presented an evening of fascinating Hindustani vocal music recital. She started with a classical raag and continued with few Bhajans. Ms. Rodrigo's beautiful rendition of ragas mesmerised the audience. Thilini did her Masters in Hindustani vocal music from Vishvabharati Vishvavidyalaya, Santiniketan, and has taken part in many cultural programmes in India while in the University.

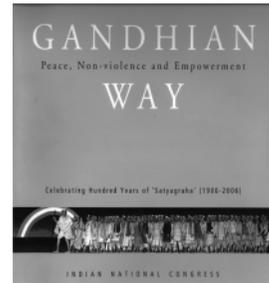
23rd November
Santoor Recital by Sangeet Praveen (Dr) Karunaratne Kiriwattuduwe



The audience who gathered at ICC for the Santoor recital were given an amazing display of the wizardry of eminent musician, Sangeet Praveen Karunaratne Kiriwattuduwe. A disciple of one of the India's most renowned Santoorist Pundit Shivkumar Sharma, Mr. Kiriwattuduwe is also a gifted and accomplished Hindustani vocalist, tablist and plays pakwaj tarshanai. His brilliant improvisations and magnificent artistry on the santoor, kept his audience totally spellbound. He was accompanied on Tabla by Sangeet Shasthrapathi Chandralal Amarakoon.

LIBRARY

Recent Library Accessions



GANDHIAN
Peace, Non-violence and Empowerment
WAY
New Delhi, Academic Foundation, 2007, pp 320

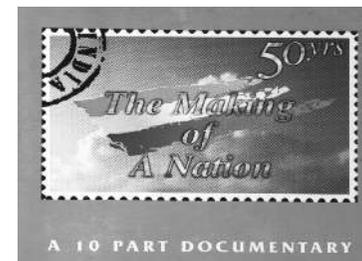
Mahatma Gandhi's humane philosophy and inherent spirituality had a profound influence not only on the people of India but the freedom loving people worldwide. 11th of September 2006 marked the centenary of the Satyagraha movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa for peaceful resistance against discriminatory and unjust laws. "Satyagraha-the firmness of the force Truth" became a powerful mass movement of peaceful resistance and civil disobedience. Over the years, it evolved into a dynamic mass movement of effective action.

Commemorating 100 years of 'Satyagraha' in a befitting manner, the Indian National Congress convened a two day international conference: "Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment: Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century". Over 300 international delegates from 91 countries comprising world leaders, Nobel laureates, leading peace and human rights activists and Gandhian scholars reflected on the essence and the enduring relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. The Conference deliberated on subjects and issues which represent the core of Gandhian principles and values including Mahatma Gandhi's concern for the poor and abiding commitment to non-violence and people's empowerment. Emerging from the discussions amongst the luminaries was the collective affirmation to renew people's commitment to Mahatma's noble mission Of building a world that is in peace and harmony with itself.

Based on the deliberations of this conference, together with precious archival material, this volume-a book for the future-endeavours to reach out and connect the people, especially the younger generation, to the 'Gandhian way' and to carry forward his legacy into the 21st century.

Films in January

The Making of a Nation



"The Making of a Nation" is a thought provoking series evaluating fifty years since Independence. Through dramatisation and archival footage the programme contemplates on the institution that existed and the ones that took shape, weighing their performance against the opportunities that were present and the impediments that hindered their functioning during the last fifty years. Institutions and issues are tackled so as to initiate a lively debate on them. A 10 part documentary series on India by the Moving Picture Co (I) Pvt. Ltd and the Ministry of External Affairs (XP Division)

NEW COURSES

HINDI

Course will commence	:	1st March 2008
Age limit	:	Over 16 years (adult class) between 7 – 15 (children class)
Course fee	:	Registration fee Rs.150/= Monthly fee Rs.200/=
Registration	:	Commence from 2nd January 2008

YOGA

Course will commence	:	1st February 2008
Class days	:	Saturday/Sunday
Age limit	:	Over 12 years
Course fee	:	Rs.2050/= (Registration fee + 6 months fee)
Registration	:	Commence from 2nd January 2008

CARNATIC VOCAL MUSIC

Course commenced	:	1st October 2007
Age limit	:	Over 7 years
Class days	:	Thursday / Saturday
Course fee	:	Registration fee Rs.250/= Monthly fee Rs.500/=
Registration	:	Commenced September 2007

Vacancies exist

DR. GEORGE GRIERSON PURASKAR (AWARD)



Prof. Indra Dassanyake learned professor, Professor of the Department of the Hindi Studies of Kelaniya University and former staff member of the Indian Cultural Centre was honoured by Indian President Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil on 18th December 2007. 28 Hindi Sevi scholars for the year 2005 and 2006 were honoured by her. Human Resource Development Minister Shri Arjun Singh presided over the function. Implemented by Central Hindi Directorate, Agra under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the scheme for honoring Hindi Sevi Scholars was commenced in 1989. Under the scheme, each awardee is given Indian Rs. one lakh, a shawl and a citation for his/her contribution for promotion and development of Hindi on national and international scale.

On behalf of the staff members, teachers, students of the Indian Cultural Centre we extend our heartiest congratulations to Prof. Indra Dassanyake

Padmashree Ratan Thiyam & his troupe to perform in Sri Lanka



Renowned Manipuri dancer Padmashree Ratan Thiyam is leading a 26-member troupe to perform on the occasion of the 59th Republic Day of India. The troupe will perform the play "My Earth", "My Love". For further details in regard to the performance please contact the Indian Cultural Centre on tel 2500014