Konkani Express

October 2013

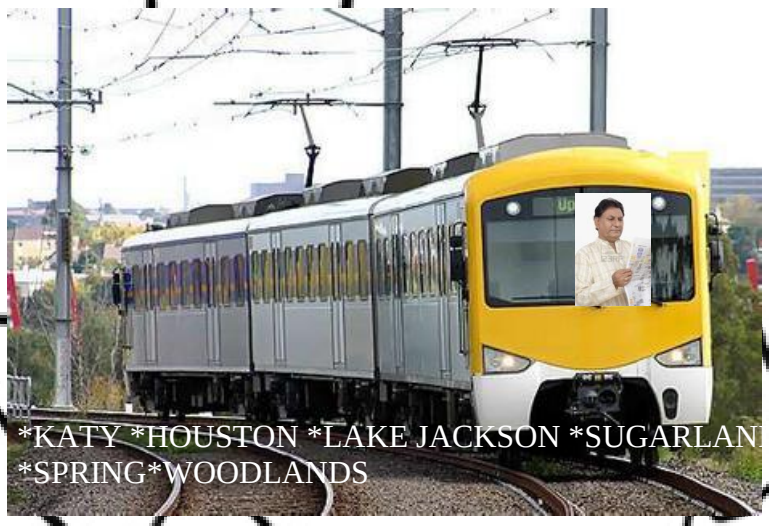
Sharatkaal:

The Myriad Shades of Fall

KONKANI EXPRESS

KONKANI EXPRESS EDITION 3

Inside this issue:



Message from HAAS President 2

Events and Festivals 3

Sadhana and Seva 4

Keeping up with The Konkanis 10

An Angel watching 14

Cooking Corner 17

Janmashtami Moments 18

MESSAGE FROM THE HAAS PRESIDENT:

Dear Greater Houston Konkani Community,

Wow! Our Janmastami function celebrating the birth of our Lord Sri Krishna was a huge success! Thanks to all our attendees, participants and the volunteers who made the event so amazing. Looking forward, we are now getting ready for the event of the year -Diwali or Deepavali (also known as the festival of lights). HAAS invites the whole Houston Konkani community to come together to celebrate this joyous occasion. For some, it signifies Lord Rama returning to Ayodhya after 14 years of Vanvas. To others, it's a celebration of the victory of Lord Krishna who killed the powerful demon Narakasura.

The traditions associated with this celebration may adapt to time and place. I remember my childhood memories of Diwali in India—the excitement of buying new clothes, the preparation of oondos, godphov, the yearly hot oil bath, going to the temple, attending angadipooja (Laxmi Pooja) ,Gopooja etc. Now that we have made our own home in the US, we make our own memories and traditions by celebrating Diwali together as one community with family and friends and variety shows of arts and entertainment!

Even though traditions may vary and we as individuals change over a period of time, the spirituality of Diwali remains the same. The divine light unifies us as it resides in each of us and all living things around us. With the hustle and bustle of daily modern life, it is so easy to lose sight of that basic tenet. We focus on our differences in order to justify squabbles or negative emotions we hold towards others. Diwali is a time to challenge ourselves to look beyond the differences and focus on finding the light (the good) that is common to all living things. When we focus on recognizing the light, the darkness we perceive in others begins to disappear and the light within us grows brighter. Diwali is a time for goodwill as well as good deeds based on each person's talent. Wishing that all of us see many lights this Diwali season and looking forward to celebrating this beautiful holiday with all of you at the Diwali Gala Night!

- Truly Maya Prabhu

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The months of Kartik, Margashira and Pausha close out the year. The month of Kartik is also known as Damodhara. ("Damo" means ropes and "udara" means abdomen). This refers to an episode wherein mother Yasoda gets frustrated and tries to tie Lord Krishna with a rope. It is considered auspicious to worship him in the form of Damodhara in this month. Festivals in this quarter include Navarathri celebrated October 5th -13th and Diwali on November 3rd.

HAPPY DIWALI!

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On Seva, Sadhana and Satsang

It was a hot, humid summer's day as three ladies representing three generations treaded their way towards the Shri Chitrapur Math in Shirali, Karnataka. They had come all the way from Houston, Texas. Mrs.Kumud Nilekini, Mrs. Kanchan Kabad and Ms. Anusuya Kabad gazed at the Math. It stood ahead of them – a beacon of spirituality. The exterior looked as it always did – a reminder of the past. Three centuries had passed by, generations had come and gone but it seemed impervious, giving a sense of continuity. As they stepped over the threshold, the past seemed to blend with the present: effortlessly and gracefully. The new granite floors gleamed. Natural sunlight streamed in through the skylights above. Time appeared to stand still as they gazed at the deity - Lord Bhavanishankar, the supreme manifestation of "Kaal" or time itself in continuous progression -- with no beginning, middle or end!

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Lord Bhavanishankar

The air reverberated with vibrations of holy chants as they approached the pontiff H.H. Shrimat Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji. They treaded softly as the approached Swamiji. Paying reverence, they sat at the feet of His Holiness. Swamiji's eyes gleamed. His countenance lit up with a radiant, compassionate smile as he taught them the importance of Sadhana, Seva and Satsang.

The seeds were sown years ago. The Saraswat Community was experiencing a cultural and spiritual reawakening following a new Mathadipati at the helm of the Chitrapur Math since 1997. This was causing ripples of excitement that were spreading from Shirali across continents reaching the Houston area.

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As years have passed, the socioeconomic and cultural landscape has changed not just in Shirali but across the seas. Konkanis like Ms. Kabad, born and bred in America, hasten to participate in these changes. The Srivalli High school and Mallapur School provide education to locals. The Paridnyan Foundation promotes rural health and economic self reliance. The Parimochan Scheme promotes rural upliftment by creating “improved livelihood opportunities for resource poor families who are below the poverty line”. Annual eye camps improve vision for villagers. Youth camps conducted by His Holiness provide spiritual education to konkanis from all over the world. The Goshala is a sanctuary allowing even animals to benefit from these winds of change.

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Can something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wing cause a typhoon halfway around the world? How did a gentle Mathadhipati taking over the helm cause such huge changes locally and afar?
Truly thy ways are inscrutable--- yet always benevolent O Lord!

II Om Namo Parvati Pataye, Har Har Mahadev II

Extracts from H.H.Shrimat Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji's message to Houston Konkanis:

On Satsang:

"When a Sadhaka starts doing Sadhana, he needs a lot of support. That's why Satsang (contact with truth) is needed. This happens when Sadhakas meet and sing Bhajans – the glories of God. Bhajans provide exhilaration and lethargy is dispelled. Then Vimarsh is very very necessary. Whatever light (prakash) is thrown on a subject, that has to be understood by Vimarsh. The process (Satsang) involves brainstorming so that what is understood is assimilated. Personal Sadhana will give you strength. Satsang will give you confidence."

On Seva:

"When one does Seva, one thinks less of oneself and more of the person you are serving. You start listening more and the questions you ask become more pertinent- Pariprashna becomes more pertinent. Do Seva every opportunity you get."

Blessings:

"Gomte kornu karyate. All my blessings. Ek jeevanenthu Sukha, Shanthi, Sampathi Sakdhakayi praptha javuka monu prarthan kartha"

Thanks to Mrs. Chaya and Mr. Madhav Ubhaykar, Mrs. Kumud Nilekini, Mrs.Kanchan Kabad, Ms.Anusuya Kabad and the Shri Chitrapur Math for their help in submission of this article

--Ramkrishna Prabhu, Houston, Texas

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Keeping Up with the Konkanis
Vaishali Nileshwar

"Trekking in the foothills of the Himalayas or walking barefoot along sandy beaches of South India", Vaishali Nileshwar was one who always drew inspiration from the beauty she saw all around her. Nishant Kelkar explores her multiple aptitudes in the context of this talent of hers.

1. ***You are a pediatric occupational therapist, how does one train to become one?*** . If you are living in the United States, you would need to do an undergrad and then a Masters degree in Occupational Therapy, which will take at least two years. So totally, it takes about 6-7 years from the time you graduate high school before you can start practicing as an occupational therapist. This will make you a qualified general Occupational Therapist, and one has to then specialize by working in a pediatric setting.

2. ***Along with being a pediatric occupational therapist, I hear you are an avid photographer. How do you also devote time to become a professional photographer?***

. I have always had an interest in photography ever since I was a child and always had a camera in my hand whether it was an old fashioned film camera, digital point and shoot or a digital SLR. I have used lots of cameras throughout my photography experience. My venture as a professional started when my colleague got engaged and asked me to take photos for the occasion. They came out well and from then on, my friends and family encouraged me to continue photography. I simply enjoy taking photographs and I think that passion filters into my work. Since I work with children at my day job, I think I have a natural affinity for photographing their innocence. I enjoy photographing children and their families the most.

3. ***Having great knowledge of photography, what advise do you give to those who wish to have their professional photos taken?***

. Check the photographer's work and portfolio before choosing the photographer and then trust the photographer once you have done so. Seeing a photographer's previous work helps since one knows the type of photos taken by the photographer.

4. ***What camera would you recommend to Konkani youth who wish to take up photography?***

. It depends on if you want a digital or film camera. I personally love Digital SLR cameras. I LOVE Nikon and recommend it to anyone who wants to pursue professional photography. Whatever you choose, take lots of classes to learn how to use it. Digital SLRs are very complicated pieces of equipment and learning everything you can about them will just help you use your camera for it was born to do: take amazing photos. Another small bit of advice is to not shoot in the "automatic" mode. Learn to use it in the manual mode and you will truly appreciate the capabilities of this fabulous piece of machinery. In my humble opinion, even though the DSLRs take great photos when used in the "auto" mode, using them in the manual mode will change your perspective completely. I still have so much to learn from more accomplished photographers and I am constantly looking for opportunities to improve my skills.

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My favorite photo is one of Asha Dhume's family I took last year. That photo makes me very happy every time I see it and realize the significance of the timing.

5. *As a professional jewelry designer, what was your favorite created piece?*

. It has a while since I have crafted jewelry since I have been pretty busy with photography. My favorite created piece has to be my birth stone necklaces. They have a lot of meaning put into them and I have made them for many of my friends. I used to do custom designing and had a website which customers could access and see my designs and order.

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6. ***Being an avid member of the Book reading club, what's your favorite book?***
. My favorite book is *Love In The Time of Cholera* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Ken Follet is one of my favorite authors and I read many of his books. Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* is another one of my favorites. I think I enjoy any books that show the richness of cultures all over the world and the strength of women from these various cultures.

7. Along with so many hobbies of yours, what other interests do you have?
. I love to run, jog and hike. I am also an avid traveler and love seeing new places and experiencing different cultures. Besides, traveling also feeds my photography passion. I am very health conscious and I love to keep fit. I love long distance running and I have run 3 Half Marathons, and am training for one more in the coming year. Cooking is also another passion of mine. I love to cook different cuisines with my family and photographing the dishes I make.

Thank You Vaishali Auntie for such an informative interview. You are very talented and I hope our Konkani members and Youth are inspired by your accomplishments.

--- Nishant Kelkar, Houston, Texas

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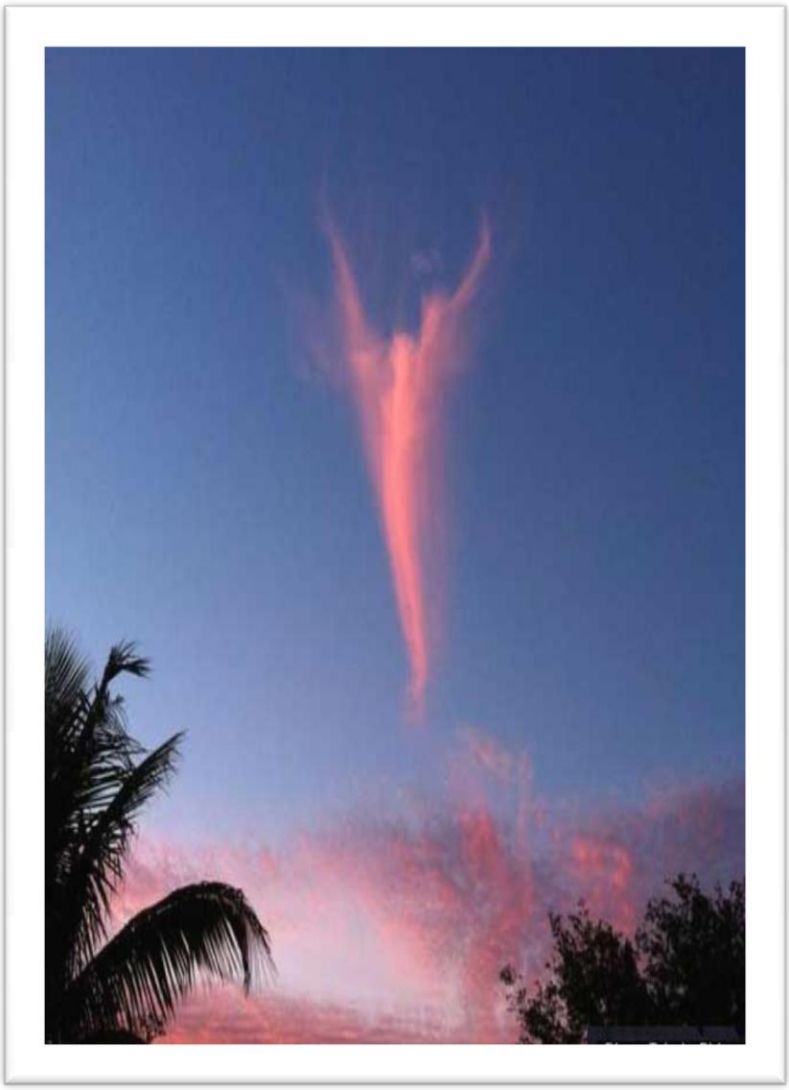
An Angel watching from above



Whenever I think about the teacher who greatly influenced me, one face always comes in to mind clearly-- My primary school headmistress, Sister Aloycia. She took me under her wings from 1st grade and treated me like her pet. She always encouraged me to dream big. My primary school was at the end of a small village where the only way to get there was 45 minutes to 1 hour walk through the green paddy fields, sometimes in rain sometimes in bright sun. The school was located by the Periyar River and surrounded by luscious mango trees, coconut trees and rice fields. Many times we had classes under the mango trees in the afternoons. All my classmates were farmer's kids and many dropped out by 7th grade. Sister Aloycia recognized my potential and came to my home to ask my parents to send me to their sister convent high school, St.Francis High School, little far away from my home in Aluva. I had to take 2 buses to

get there but my parents sent me to the high school in town.
I still remember the day when my class was interrupted as HS headmistress's peon came to get me in the class. I was scared to death as the only time you are asked to come to headmistress's office is when you are in trouble. When I went there I saw Sister Aloycia waiting for me. She dropped by just to see me in the high school and to say good bye as she was transferring to Trivandrum. That was the last time I saw her.
But she kept in touch as she wrote almost every month or so. When I finished High school, she was the one who told me that I need to dream big and set my goal to become a doctor or an Engineer. I didn't have any aspiration to become any of that till she insisted that I write the entrance exam.

Then one day after my entrance coaching class, when I came home all tired, I crashed in the bed with the newspaper to read the news. One of the news items was in regards to a middle aged convent sister who died in an Auto rickshaw accident in Trivandrum!!!! Somehow without even reading the news, I knew it was sister Aloycia. She many times wrote to me before on how reckless people drive in cities and how she misses our village atmosphere etc. and then I read the news and it was her. Apparently the auto rickshaw she was travelling was behind a tempo van which was loaded with big tree trunks that were not secured properly. When the driver applied the brakes the tree trunks came loose and crashed through auto rickshaw she was travelling and she died instantly. I cried so much that day. After couple of months , I met another sister from the same convent who came by to see me in college to tell me how much sister Aloycia loved me and how she will be happy to see me become an Engineer. She said sister Aloycia wants at least one student from that elementary school to become a professional. Couple of months after this incident, I wrote the entrance exam and passed and went on to become an Engineer. But she was not there to see me. I still remember her face even though I don't have any pictures with her. I still remember how she would suggest my name for every leadership role in school, how she would put me in the center spot for school dances and dramas, how she scolded my mom when my nose was pierced in 5th grade by my grandma without any anesthesia and my nose got infected, how she came home without any invitation just to talk about my future with my parents and how she will write letters to inspire me and keep in touch.

I'm sure she is watching me from above and being happy to see me achieve my dreams and her dreams!!! I still feel her presence when I visit my elementary school!!! Happy Teacher's day to the Guru who touched my life!!
--Gayathri Rao, Sugarland, Texas

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South Asian Health Needs Assessment:

(SAHNA) Research Study:

The Indian American Cancer Network (IACAN) with The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center is conducting a landmark health survey of Asian Indians living in the Houston Metropolitan Area. The survey will be administered at several community events.

BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

* The SAHNA research survey will help us understand the health status and health needs of the rapidly growing Asian Indian community.

* Results will inform healthcare providers, researchers, and policy makers on the best ways to address Asian Indian health issues.

* Data from the survey may be used to apply for funding for programs to improve health in our community.

To participate, you must be an Asian Indian adult, 18 years and older, live in Harris, Fort Bend, Brazoria or Galveston counties, able to read and understand English or Hindi. Only 1 member per household may participate.

For more information about (SAHNA), please contact Dr. Beverly Gor, bjgor@mdanderson.org, (713) 563-2750 or Dr. Mala Pande, mpande@mdanderson.org, (713) 745-5625 or IACAN at iacannetwork@gmail.com, (713) 370-3489

iacan
INDIAN AMERICAN CANCER NETWORK
Coping, Caring, Connecting

P.S.:

The survey will be available at our Diwali function at Madras Pavilion. Kindly contact Mrs. Kanchan Kabad for details.

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Dates to Note:

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

When: November 2, 2013 Diwali Gala Night will be celebrated!!
Where: Madras Pavilion, Sugarland Texas

Inspirational Saying:

"*Hastasya bhooshanam Daanam*"(Giving donation is the ornament of the hands)

"*Satyam Kanthasya Bhooshanam*" (Speaking truth is the ornament of the voice)

"*Srotrasya Bhooshanam Shaastram*" (Listening to scriptures is the ornament of ears)

"*Netrasta Samadarshita*" (Seeing everyone equally is the ornament of the eyes)

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CHIKKI

Chikki is a delicious snack which is popular during Diwali. BMC schools in Mumbai provide 19 tonnes of chikki per day to schoolchildren to improve nutrition. Mrs. Sharada Pai of Houston, Texas shares her recipe to make this delectable sweet!

Konkani Creativity & Cooking Corner

Ingredients: 1 cup sesame seeds

1 1/4 cups sugar

Cashews, pistachios are optional. Increase amount of sugar as per measure.

1/4 teaspoon cardamom

Few strands of saffron (optional)

Mix sesame seeds, cashews, ground cardamom and keep the bowl ready.

Grease inside of a steel plate (watte) with little melted butter or oil. I use homemade toop.

Place sugar in a heavy bottom stainless steel or non stick pan on the gas.

Put sugar in the pan and keep stirring with wooden ladle.

Sugar will melt and turn light brownish. (In less than 5-7 mins). Do not wait longer till the sugar syrup turns hard.

Add sesame seeds, cashews mix in that plate. Stir very fast to mix nicely. Remove from gas and pour this mix in the greased plate. Smooth it with a greased steel bowl to spread the mix to look even. Take a butter knife and make marks for the size of chikki. (2"x 2") when the mix is hot. When it cools down, it will just break. In 10 mins you will be able to remove the chikkis. If not, I just hit the bottom of the plate with chapatti roller.The chikkis should slide easily. If not, then just take out each piece carefully with greased butter knife.

This chikki tastes better than famous **Lonavala Chikki and it's clean. Prepared with love for family and friends.**

■ Sharda Pai, Houston, Texas

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JANMASHTAMI 2013

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Have you checked out our website?
www.ourhass.com

HAAS has been formed to provide a common meeting ground for the Amchigeles residing in and around the Greater Houston area.

Our mission is to

- Preserve and promote our culture, tradition and deep rooted heritage.
- Confer the values and spirit of our culture to generations after us, and
- Provide an opportunity to network socially and professionally with other Amchigeles.

Houston Area Amchigele Samaj

www.ourhass.com

HAAS has been created to preserve and promote our culture so that we can pass it on to future generations.

We would like to hear from you on how we can help our organization have greater impact.

If you have any new ideas to encourage youth involvement or any service opportunities for our organization– we would love to hear from you.

Also, if you have any specific concerns or goals you would like addresses, we hope to hear from you as well!

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