



ANKUR DIWALI 2007 - Editorial.

The way 'we' celebrate the festival of lights

Yes! It is Diwali time again. The festivities have already begun and ANKUR is ready to take a plunge into the celebrations. The preparations are underway and the spirits are high. As we promised, it is going to be bigger than ever at Pitt.

The Diwali event this time will consist of three separate parts, each depicting individual but inseparable components of an authentic desi diwali. The first part will be a mela where Indian handicrafts, arts, literature and food will be on display and will be available for purchase at nominal prices. This will present a great opportunity for both Indian and international crowd to witness the rich culture we represent. Too bad we could not arrange for a giant wheel but there will be enough in the mela to keep you busy and enjoying!

Then we move on to the cultural stage program. We will start with Laxmi puja. After that, we have in store for you various stage presentations including traditional and bollywood dances, drama, light music, orchestra, karaoke etc. The enthusiastic participants and volunteers are working hard to make the night full of fun and frolic. You will witness both the traditional and the more modern Indian culture represented in these performances. After the cultural program, we have for you authentic Indian dinner prepared by expert chefs from Taj Mahal restaurant. Delicacies from various parts of India are on the menu.

In the last part, lets get on the dance floor with the deejay and tap our feet

to the popular bollywood numbers. The music will include bhangra, garba and tapori mumbaiya music to make the show more lively. You can interact with the 'pros' and learn some steps too. We will make it a night to remember.

We also have for you a special Saawariya promotion during the show. We will distribute Saawariya audio cds, posters and post-cards as the part of promotional campaign. It will be a great opportunity to take a sneak peek into the most hyped bollywood movie this year. I am sure, Sanjay Leela Bhansali will not disappoint the crowds.

So be there in the William Pitt union all day on november 10th to celebrate the festival of lights with us. We promise you a gala time. The tickets are on sale at the ticket office in WPU. It costs a nominal \$5 in advance and \$8 at the door. That's a nice incentive for an advance purchase. See you all there!

Point of view - Divyasheel Sharma.

Navratri - fun, frolic n more

If there is one time I miss India most, it's this festive season. Come October-November, it's Navratri, Dussehra, Diwali all synonymous to family, friends, fun, frolic, feasts and festivities. And aaah, how can I forget... it's the time for Hindi cinema's biggest blockbuster screenings of the year - I'm waiting for Saawariya and hope

some Pittsburgh cinema hall gets it! I can imagine you all miss the same.

I remember the times in India when Navratri meant our parents fasting and staying awake late at night eulogizing Goddess Durga in *Jagraatas*. Thanks to the large Gujarati population in US that Dandiya and Garbha traditions have migrated to US. For me, this time has always been romantically exhausting with the amount of leaps and jumps I stumble upon trying to do the exquisitely synchronized Dandiya with eloquently dressed and strikingly beautiful girls around me.

As much as it is a fun event for the most of us, it also has a philosophy attached to it. In Sanskrit, *Nav* means *nine* and, it also means *new*, *ra* means *night*, *tri* means *three*. Navratri used to be the nine nights that ancient Indians would rest their body, mind and soul contrary to the modern outlook it has had nowadays. The only indulgence prescribed was divine. When the trident of body, mind and soul are put to rest at night the rejuvenation takes place. This time is to be spent in gaining patience, abstaining from materialism and worldly attachments. *Tri* also stands for the three *gunas* (qualities) - *tamas* (ignorance), *rajas* (passion) and *sattva* (goodness). The sincere seekers would seek to get in touch with their inner spiritual being and perform *up-vaas* (that now in English, we have come to know as fasting, and that actually meant *to sit next to* (Guru/ provider of wisdom)), to win over these qualities and become a more balanced human being. Navratri is also a parallel drawn to the nine months of human creation that takes place in the darkness of a mother's womb.

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Ritualistically, after meditation and fasting (which actually did not intend people to stay hungry, but to avoid giving in to instinctive and passionate drives), the nights are also spent lauding the various qualities (each Goddess is a representation of a quality/virtue) that we would like to gain but not get caught up with. Here, the assumption is that by lauding and focusing on the good qualities of others we tend to gain those qualities in ourselves. The virtues are represented by different reincarnations of Hindu Goddess – as Laxmi, Durga and Saraswati mapping to wealth, valor and wisdom. At many places, nine reincarnations of Durga are worshipped along with the nine planets that govern life in our universe. After these nine nights of penance, patience, spiritual conduct and reflection, the seekers would come out with an enhanced (contemporarily speaking) spiritual quotient.

The victorious self is celebrated on the tenth night as Vijay Dashmi – also popularly known as Dussehra. According to Hindu mythology, it is the day when Lord Rama defeated Ravana. It symbolizes the win of good over evil. Unfortunately, it is not much of a celebration in the US on the night of Dussehra. I guess, since we do not understand the meaning of the first nine nights, we do not celebrate the tenth. Come to think of it, who wouldn't like to party after 9 days of test!

Wishing you great times this festive season!

Reflections - Varsha Shridhar.

Small reflections on life

I dread and dislike winter. After having spent two winters in Pittsburgh and battling the wind and the rain and the piercing cold, I have given up any pretence of feelings of anticipation or happiness at the thought of it. Spring

makes me downright ecstatic and optimistic, summer makes me contented and calm, fall brings with it a deep sense of impending doom while winter brings with it its assortment of coughs, colds, bitterness and feelings of despair. One of my best friends tells me to accept winter, to think of it as a part of life. Coming from India, with its eternal summer season, I cannot accept this theory. Winter seems to me alien and unnatural.

All this underwent a subtle change this morning. I roped in this same friend and we went on a hike on the hills of Schenley Park to capture the beauty of the fall colors on film. We started out on Marijuana Hill and hiked down to the Bridle Trail. It was sunny, with just a hint of cold. Once we had hiked far enough, we could block out the sounds of the traffic at the foot of the hill and hear the screeching of the birds. Here there were wild flowers and tiny forest floor animals we hadn't come across before. The trees stood, some mighty and strong, some slender and pale. How best to photograph the vibrant reds and vivid yellows? How best to capture the interplay between the elemental forces of the earth, wind and the sun?

I clicked away madly at everything I saw, with my little camera, in my attempts not to miss out on even a single bit of color- close ups, zooms, landscapes, shadows, under the trees, over the trees, you name it. It normally takes us about an hour to reach Oakland, it took us 3 this time. Finally, exhausted of the endless pointing and clicking, we sat down under one these trees. Talk gradually gave way to silence. And there, surrounded by the forest, sitting on the ground, I felt more alive and in harmony with life than ever before. Random thoughts flitted across my mind. I recalled the days of spring: tiny buds opening up, tender saplings pushing out of the earth, to worship the sun. And here were the same flowers and plants slowly turning brown and dry. And there I realized, what order, what periodicity exists in life. Everything

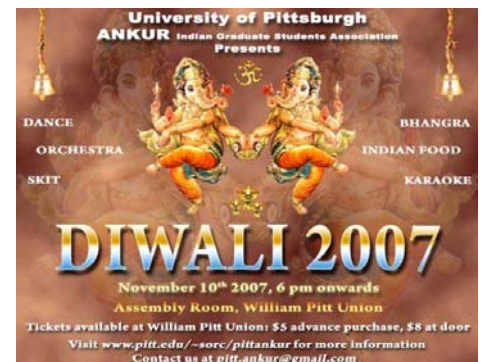
goes through a cycle: days turn into nights, seasons change, death follows life, which follows death. Everything dies and everything is reborn.

Winter too is a part. Winter, with its harshness and fingers of cold, is the time life takes a break, a snooze to rejuvenate itself. Without winter, would spring really be as beautiful? Without winter, would fall have the same melancholy appeal? Without winter, would trees and plants stir themselves into one final burst of life before fading? Yes, winter is hard. But with it, comes the hope of new life.

So. I shrug and buy myself a wildly colored winter jacket, to remind myself of that. And then, with a final "C'est La Vie!", I go forth to meet winter.

ANKUR - Upcoming Events.

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