

Spring  
2011



# Sandesh

“The Message”

A Newsletter from IndUS of Fox Valley

## From Editors' Desk

The magic of spring is inescapable. Since the advent of language, poets have sung its glory, and people all around the world have celebrated its arrival with great anticipation, joy, and with music and dance. Hope springs eternal in every heart.

For the great Indian poet Kalidasa, spring meant:

*The trees are with flowers, and ponds  
are filled with blossoming lotuses  
The gentle breeze carries with  
fragrance that sets the hearts of lovers  
to yearn..*

Robert Frost captures his expectations from spring thus:

*Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard  
white,*

*Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by  
night;*

*And make us happy in the happy bees,  
The swarm dilating round the perfect  
trees.*

For little Thumper in Bambi, spring meant pitter-patter, and for most of in Wisconsin, spring means hoping to put away shovels for a few months and look forward to boats, barbeque and beer of Summer. For, spring in Wisconsin is a brief, uncertain interlude!

This issue of *Sandesh* is happy to celebrate spring. We feature articles from our friends in Germany, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and of course, India, to capture different rhythms, different colors and different sounds that herald the arrival of spring. For

Sabrina Pruss, spring in Germany means blooming flowers, and Easter celebrations culminating in a dinner. In Afghanistan, the arrival is celebrated as “Melahai Nowroozi” or the New Years Day when farmers get down to seeding and children enjoy the carnivals and rides. Sonja Downing informs us that in Indonesia, the advent of Spring is observed, rather than celebrated. Following a boisterous parade of the demons, Indonesians observe a day of silence and contemplation in Neypi. Finally, from India, Sandhya Sridhar captures the essence of that naughty, colorful, joyous festival of Holi when Indian are splashed, painted and drenched in colors, and bon fires at night bid *adieu* to winter. The Editorial team hopes that you enjoy reading this issue. Please provide your feedback.

Sandesh

An IndUS of Fox Valley  
Publication

### Editors

Dr. Badri Varma  
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*The views expressed in  
the articles are not  
necessarily those of the  
Editors or IndUS of  
Fox Valley*

## Holi in India

By Sandhya Sridhar

Holi, one of my most favorite holidays, to pass us without getting splotted by is a harbinger of Spring, a season of new colors. Reds, greens, blues and yellows, beginnings. Oh, how wonderful it was to a handful of powders and pistons filled splash colors on unsuspecting friends, with colored water were weapons neighbors and passers-by! In an instant, enough for hours of revelry. More I become that fun loving child in me. We soaked we got, more we could boast the did not spare anyone, not even strangers next day of how much fun we had.



On a Holi day, my Japanese neighbor in India pulled his camera out and ran towards a colorful bunch of revelers. They were dancing and throwing dusty clouds of colors in air. What a wonderful photo-op! Little did he know that this was one day when even the most mild-mannered ones can turn into rowdy ruffians. Whether he liked it or not, he got splashed. He had no choice but be a

sport and take it all in with a smile.

That is the spirit of Holi, a celebration that starts at the end of winter, on the full-moon night of the last month of a lunar calendar. It lasts for five days till Rangapanchami. Rang means color and panchami is the fifth day. In some places in Northern India, it lasts even longer. The region of Vrindavan and Mathura where Lord Krishna grew-up the celebration goes on for two weeks. Krishna was and continues to be every girl's beloved. Indian women are in love with him. For several millennia they have sung songs for him, danced with him and played Holi with him.

On the eve of Holi, bonfires are lit and stories are told about burning of Goddess Holika for her demonic behavior, and a miraculous escape of young Prahlad. Another one is about Lord Shiva opening his third eye and burning Kama, a god of love, only to

restore him later, not in a physical form but in a spiritual sense. Youngsters go around neighborhoods



collecting firewood and any flammable refuse, including old furniture to pile it as high as possible. It's time for spring-cleaning. It's time to enjoy that last bit of precious winter in the warmth of roaring flames, with family and friends, singing and sharing .....oh so delicious ghost stories late into night. Every society has at least one celebration that serves like a safety valve. It allows people to step beyond their normal zone, act somewhat silly, and disregard conventions, albeit for a day. Holi is

Halloween in that sense of the word. On this day young people do not ask for permission to take stuff from your yard. It just disappears into that tall pile. People are ready and eager to smear perfect strangers with colors. They will even cross otherwise well-guarded gender lines, all in good fun.

One last lingering memory of Holi was the treat we got the day after the bonfire. We dug out burnt coconuts from the ashes, part of the offerings made to Holika Devi. Cracking open their brown hard shells, now turned into coal and to scoop out that well roasted flesh was a treat out of this world. Will I ever be able to recreate that experience for my kids grown-up in Wisconsin? I think not. □

*Dr. Sandhya Sridhar teaches at the School of Business Administration, university of Wisconsin Oshkosh. She has been involved with so many activities of IndUS of Fox Valley right from its inception. Currently she serves as the President of the organization.*

## Nyepi: The Silent Day

*By Sonja Lynn Downing & Dewa Ketut Alit Adnyana*

There is no Spring in Bali, at least not how those of us from less tropical climates think of the season. Part of the nation of Indonesia, the island of Bali is eight degrees south of the equator. Flowers bloom year round and trees never lose their leaves. Even the rice harvests are staggered, so that any given vista may include paddies that are filled with water waiting to be planted, some just showing the small early shoots of green, and others full of golden rice ready to be cut. In fact, the main indigenous calendric system in Bali is based, not on the solar year or lunar months, but on the 210-day length of time it takes for the native species of rice to grow and be harvested.

One important Balinese holiday, however, marks the beginning of the new year in a different calendric system, called the Çaka calendar, which was brought to what is now Indonesia from South Asia as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. This holiday is called Nyepi, which in Balinese means the "Day to be Silent," and usually falls in March or April (March 5 in 2011). On this day we do not work but instead stay at home, refrain from making loud noises, and do not use electricity. All non-emergency transportation is banned, and even the international airport is closed.

The day before Nyepi is quite the opposite: people create large statues of ugly and fierce monsters out of

wooden frames and colorful foam and fabric. These statues, called ogoh-ogoh, are paraded through town carried by large groups of young men and accompanied by *beleganjur* ensembles, playing drums, cymbals, and gongs. These parades are deliberately noisy and festive. Once everyone has gotten all of that noise and energy out of their systems, they are ready to be quiet the next day for Nyepi.

There are a variety of reasons for being silent on this day. Some people say that this day particularly bad spirits abound, and so people have taken to staying at home quietly so as to hide from them. In any case, the lack of noise from radios, TVs, stereos, and especially traffic results

in being able to hear the sounds of the natural environment clearly and directly. Suddenly you are aware of house geckos, crickets, and several different kinds of birds, as well as the breeze rustling the leaves of the coconut palms.

Some people take the opportunity of this peace and rest to fast and meditate, though others may just spend the time being (relatively)

quiet with family members. The chance to hear and really listen to all of the natural sounds around us for an entire twenty-four hours leaves us refreshed, cleansed, and revitalized. Even though there is no winter of which to celebrate the end, we think these feelings of renewal are certainly analogous to those brought by Spring in other parts of the world. □

*Sonja Lynn Downing and Dewa Ketut Alit Adnyana both teach at Lawrence University in Appleton. Sonja is a Senior Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology. Dewa, a native of Bali, Indonesia, is a Lecturer of Music and directs Gamelan Cahaya Asri, Lawrence's Balinese gamelan (traditional Indonesian percussion music) group. This year they will be celebrating Nyepi in Appleton, quietly.*

## Spring in Germany

*By Sabrina Pruss*

Spring starts in Germany, like in a lot of other countries, officially around the 20th of March. Springtime comprises of the spring months March, April and May. After the cold and long wintertime everybody is looking forward to spring. Most people consider it the most beautiful time of the year because of the warmth and light that they missed throughout the wintertime. As the sun lightens the earth flowers, trees and bushes start to grow and bloom and everywhere it turns green. Friends and birds return back and the air is full of smells and twitter. Animals are busy building or looking for habitats to nest.

Based on the fact that nature is coming back to life, people feel motivated to spend more time outside as well. They rearrange things, run into their neighbors, work in their gardens, clean up their houses and feel lively again. Although spring has a vitalizing effect on most people, some suffer from a kind of springtime lethargy due to the dark wintertime when not having the opportunity to move a lot outside.

An important event in Germany within springtime is Easter. People actually prepare for this holiday in April. Houses get decorated. Easter decorations, for example wooden figures (rabbits, birds, eggs) colorfully painted, and tulips, can be found in almost every house. Nonetheless Easter does not only consist of a "merry" holiday, it is also a time of reflection and sacrifice. Before celebrating the Easter lot of people, particularly the elder ones, take part in the fasting period. Participation in Lenten is actually decreasing because of weakening influence of religion and of old traditions. Religious institutions still try to promote fasting. During this time the person fasting is not supposed to eat sweets or other delicacies, things that are considered as a real treat. The intention of this special time is to clean mind and body. The Easter festival commences after the fasting period including Good Friday and Saturday, when no meat but fish is served for lunch or dinner.

On Easter Sunday and Monday most

families get together to spend time and have dinner. A typical Easter dish is lamb, boiled potato and vegetables.

The following month of May is considered to be one of the most beautiful months of the year as it is starting to get warm outside. Despite the fact that lot of holidays are taking place (e.g. Ascension Day) in May, people love the fact that the days are getting really longer and that there is even more time left in the evenings that can be spent outside.

To sum up it can be said that to most people springtime is like an eagerly awaited holiday, time offering an opportunity to enjoy and to re-experience the beautiful life surrounding us. □

*Sabrina Pruss is a student from Germany spending one semester at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Her hometown is Neuenkirchen which is located in the northwestern part of Germany. It is a rural village with about 14,000 inhabitants and characterized by traditions and religion.*

*In the spring I have counted one hundred and thirty-six different kinds of weather inside of four and twenty hours."*

~ Mark Twain

*In springtime, love is carried on the breeze. Watch out for flying passion or kisses whizzing by your head."*

~ Emma Racine de Fleur

## Springtime in Afghanistan

By Yama Waziri

The arrival of spring in Afghanistan has a tremendous impact on the life of the people. The arrival of spring means the start of work for farmers, construction workers and other professionals who are dependent on the seasonal work. Due to weather conditions and poverty, construction work in Afghanistan in winter is not possible. So most people wait during winter for the arrival of spring to start with their work and start earning money. Since the arrival of spring has a tremendous meaning and impact on the people's lives, they welcome spring with huge festivals and events.

The first day of spring in Afghanistan is called "The Farmer's Day". At the same time the first day of spring is the first day (Nowroz) of the Afghan year, called "The Farmer's Day" as from this day on the farmers start to seed their crops. Beside the farmers, traditionally everybody on this day plant some seeds in the backyard, in the garden, or in front of the house as a symbol of growth and prosperity



Children at the Melahai Noowroozi

for the coming year.

The first day of spring, Farmer's Day is also the first day of the new year. It usually falls around March 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup>. People celebrate this New Harvest festival by visiting each other. The Farmer's day is a public holiday. Days before people start preparing for this day, which is one of the most important days of the year. Dependent on the wealth of the family every family member gets new clothes and shoes and children get money as gift. Of course rich families are able to spend more while poor families are not able to spend a lot of money on new clothes. The

New Year Festival is called "Melahai Nowroozi", translated into English it means "The Festival of the New Day." While the Festival of the New Day lasts 40 days. On the first day people go for picnics with their families or visit other family members. "The Melahai Nowroozi" very much is a fun fair. Children and adults play games, listen to the music, or fly kites. Officially the "Melahai Nowroozi" starts with soaring of Ali's banner, who was the 4<sup>th</sup> calif and the son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed. □

*Yama Waziri was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. He left Afghanistan at the age of five and went to Germany where the biggest part of his family had already lived for over twenty years. He grew up in Germany and never ever went back to Afghanistan during this time. Thus, he does not have any memory of spring time and how people celebrate the arrival of spring in Afghanistan. All his impressions expressed here are based on the narrations of his parents. His dream is to experience the arrival of spring in Kabul one day.*

A Short Story

## A Kannada Girl and a Delhi Spring

By Ratna Rao

Chaya looks around her and absorbs the pungent odour of incense, the mirrored maroon table cloth, the ten glittering rings on the fortune teller's fat fingers and the strange pictures hanging on the walls of a dingy room. Chaya dismisses future reading as mumbo jumbo. And yet ... here she is listening to the large lady in multi-coloured skirts.

It began with that phone call. No, actually it began seven years ago when she sat next to Arvind in Class IX. Over melting *kulfis* and steaming

*aalu-tikkis* they grew close. She had even settled upon the color of her wedding saree and his sherwani. She had planned her list of first luncheon guests. But last month Arvind mumbled that he had never looked at her 'like that'.

Her clueless father suggested a matrimonial alliance, for an arranged marriage. Chaya agreed to see the 'boy', if only to spite Arvind! She would show him that she was 'marriage material'.

On Sunday Col. Sundaresh in a stiff

blue suit arrived with his wife, mother and son. *Samosas* and *burfis* were served. Tea was sipped and mild chatter endured. The 'boy' looked confident in his suede jacket. Chaya tugged at her long sweater, ready to say YES. After two nail-biting days Col. Sundaresh called and very politely said, 'Sorry sir, we compared their astrological charts and found that they don't match. What can we do? God is not willing. Your fine daughter will find a more suitable alliance'.

Chaya sits up with a jerk as she replays the memory of that phone call. Rejected again? Dismay and shock bring her to this cramped room. She hears a jingle of beads and a deep soft voice, 'Wait for SPRING. Spring will change everything. I see good positive change in your life'.

Is spring here? Chaya wonders as she goes on her Sunday jog. The Delhi mist envelops the morning air but she does not wear layered clothing anymore. Light green leaves appear on branches. They shimmer in the morning light and smile in anticipation. It's as if the trees have abruptly woken from a deep slumber and stretch in a burst of energy.

The pots in her neighbour's balcony ... were they always so green and leafy? She has never paid attention to such details before. She has read that spring means new life. Will she meet CHANGE today?

Nothing momentous happens. A week goes by. The temple yard has a radiant row of large dahlias in so many vibrant shades. Purple, pink, yellow and ... look at that one! Its deep red petals flaked with white streaks remind her of a tiger. Has SPRING already arrived?

The roads suddenly have more people. Sedate beige and black has given way to alluring lilac and snappy red. Hindi film songs with amorous lyrics fill the air. Families share laughter and dreams. The Spring Season is called Vasantha Rithu. Has it arrived? She wonders.

'Chaya, come here' her father urges. Papa is like that. Little things excite him and the family rushes to indulge. 'God has played *holi*' he says, turning poetic. They crowd into the balcony. Down below they see a large patch of colours. Wild flowers, some small and some very small, bloom among the grass and rocks of the ill maintained apartment garden.

'Oh yeah', Chaya slaps her forehead. How could she forget? March 19<sup>th</sup> is Holi. Holi is associated with Lord Krishna and his *gopikas*, with romance, and with new life. We squirt coloured water at each other, we smear a riot of dry powders pink, red and purple on wet faces, we sing songs in the courtyards and we devour syrupy sweets. Surely *must be Spring*. Isn't Holi a spring festival!

Does Holi mark the beginning or end of Spring? She wonders. 'Papa', she asks, 'Is spring here?' He points at the newspaper, 'Well, the Spring

Celebrations, a fortnight of music concerts, book releases and performances have begun. So I guess, officially, SPRING is HERE!'

Chaya catches her breath in expectation. 'Wait for SPRING. Spring will change everything. I see good positive change in your life'.

Ting tong, the doorbell beckons. Chaya opens the door to a young lady cuddling a brown pup. 'I live in Tower 3. We have a litter of four pups. Would you like one?' Chaya gazes at the beady black eyes. She accepts him tenderly and decides that he is *Chiguru*. Chiguru in Kannada, a language she speaks at home, means tender new leaf. This tender new leaf will bring a *positive good change* in her life. Chaya hugs Chiguru and takes him into the house. Her papa looks on amused and her mama looks on, not so amused. Spring is here. And that is the beginning of another story! □

*A post graduate in English Literature Ratna Rao has a long career as teacher for High School students and then as Subject Matter Expert in an e-learning company in Bangalore. Now a freelance content provider for publications and online websites she lives in Delhi exploring a new life in a new city.*



## News ...

**Diversity Club, Hortonville High School:** On October 21, 2010, IndUS organized a presentation on the social and cultural aspects of India. This was followed by a classical Bharatanatyam dance by Preeti Parekh. Students and faculty thoroughly enjoyed *mehendi* and Indian refreshments served to them. A live-ly Question and Answer session was both interesting and informative.

**Multicultural Night and Presentation on India at Ferber Elementary School, Appleton:** On November 12, 2010, IndUS participated in the Multicultural Night. The IndUS featured Indian food, dresses, *mehendi*, posters, art and craft items. Several young performed an Indian dance. Sriddevi Buddi, the Coordinator of Educational and Outreach Programs of IndUS, returned to the school on December 15 and 22, to make presentations to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders, respectively. Young

children were eager participants in Q&A sessions, and in trying *mehendi*, dress-up and refreshments.

## IndUS - 2010



IndUS-2010 annual banquet was again a sold out event. This year marked tenth anniversary of official formation of IndUS, and IndUS-010 was our twelfth annual banquet. The theme this year was *In the Wonderland of Indian Cinema*. The evening started at 5:00 PM with a reception, exhibition and a cocktail hour for socialization. A red carpet welcome led the guests through a corridor that was decorated to make them feel like stars attending the Oscars or the Filmfare Awards ceremony!

The exhibition that was organized around three different areas: Indian



Cinema: *Now and Then*, *Cinema as an Escape*, and the *Parallel Indian Cinema*, was both informative and interesting. The exhibition also included live performances entitled *Dances from Golden Years* by Ashwini Murthy and Monica Singh, Group Therapy, an ensemble of local physicians and friends led by Dr.



Dilip Tannan, performed "*A Musical Tribute to A. R. Rehman*". Guests, many of them dressed like their favorite film stars, mingled with friends over delectable appetizers and cocktails. It was a great treat all five senses!

The assembly in the banquet hall commenced with the lamp lighting ceremony. Joining the Honorable Congressman Steve Kagen from Eight district, and Honorable Mayor Tim Hannah of Appleton were representatives of IndUS volunteers, Sonja Downing and Srinivas Dadi. Rachel Manek, anchor person on "Good Day



Wisconsin' show of Fox 11 News channel and Sridevi Buddi, Chair of Education and Outreach committee of IndUS of Fox Valley were the emcees.

Consistent with the culture of giving, Dr. Sandhya Sridhar, President of



IndUS, and Dr. Nidhi Kumar, President of India Association of Northeast Wisconsin, jointly presented \$1500 to Ms. Sandy Drexler of the United Way of Fox Cities, and \$500 to Ms. Beth Schnorr of Harbor House, Appleton. Mr. Tim Higgins, Chair of the IndUS Board was joined by Dr. B. S. Sridhar, Coordinator of Investing In Children Program, presented a check for \$3000 to Mr. Curt Detjen of Appleton Downtown Rotary Club toward reconstruction of a school in

earth-quake affected Haiti.

The spread at the banquet represented cuisine from different regions of India. Chef Peter D'Souza deftly blended a variety of flavors, colors and spices into a memorable feast, prompting guests to profuse praise.

The Silent Auction returned this year with several articles and services to lure a broad range of interests and price levels. We appreciate the support of all donors and buyers. Funds raised will be donated projects serving the needs of children.

The cultural program consisting of a multi-media entertainment, due to a last-minute technical glitch, had to be modified into live stage performances only. The audience was entertained by a variety of dances drawn from movies in Hindi, Marathi and Kannada belonging to five different decades. Ashwini



Murthy and Monica Singh performed dances that were based classical Indian dance forms of Bharatnatyam and Kathak. A rigorous, foot-tapping folk dance from a Marathi movie



featured Pranalee Dahivatkar, Prachee Joshi, Shyamalee Joshi, Sail Joshi, Aishwarya Parulekar, Yash

**The Board of Directors**

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(*Education & Outreach*)

Mr. Rajeev Dugal (*Fund Raising*)

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Dr. Badri Varma  
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Parulekar, Naveen Shetty, and Nitin Thitte. Priyanka Parekh presented a fusion number. The finale featured a fusion number that drew all the dancers in the program and many from the audience. The cultural program was produced, directed and narrated by B. S. Sridhar.

**Leadership Fox Cities program, Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce: The Leadership Fox Cities observed the Arts day.**

On December 14, 2010 and invited IndUS to make a presentation on Indian performing arts. B. S. Sridhar made a presentation on the dances and music of India. This was followed by a music demonstration by Sujal Baherawala followed by a dance performance by Viju Sethu Rao, Pushpa Arava and Charu.

**Let's Share**

Let's Share is a forum where friends of IndUS come together, share, learn, discuss and grow. The first session of Let's Share this year was held on Sunday, January 30, 2011, at Andrew Commons, Warch Center, Lawrence University, Appleton. Morgan Wiswall, Purchasing Manager, Menasha Corporation, and Kartik Ravel, Senior Director for Green IT, Fujitsu were the presenters and the topic was: "Sustainability in Practice: What We Can Do?" The two informative presentations were followed by a stimulating discussion. Time Higgins, ChiroServices, and B. S. Sridhar, Management Professor at University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh were the presenters at Let's Share that was held on Sunday, February 27, 2011 at Harmony Café, Appleton. Presentation and discussions focused on "the Art and Power of Networking". The speakers as also the audience explored the importance, the benefits and strategies of networking. Future topics for Let's Share include: "From Idea to Patent

to commercialization", "Myths and Realities of Yoga and Meditation", "Sleep Apnea", "Parenting in Multi-Cultural Context. Please await announcements.

**Volunteer Recognition Dinner**

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, IndUS volunteers and their families gathered at UW Fox Valley for an evening of fun, games, good food and good company. This is our way to thank dedicated volunteers for their contribution to IndUS. Every year we also use this forum to select a theme for the next annual banquet, a celebration of Indo-American friendship. Two of our active volunteers, Allen and Sharon Blake were Masters of Ceremony. After refreshments, Aishwarya Parulekar and Kirti Raut shared couple of new group games. Grown-ups and kids



had lot of fun playing them. Before dinner, Sridhar shared a short list of three possible themes. These were determined from voting on ten themes by the last steering committee. They were: Festivals of India, Indian Weddings and, Freedom: India's Tryst With Destiny. Majority of the volunteers chose Freedom: India's Tryst With Destiny as the theme for IndUS 2011. These included absentee ballots. Considering the events unfolding in the Middle Eastern countries in the past few months, this theme will, no doubt help us educate others of a freedom movement that succeeded in making India the largest and one of the most vibrant democracies of the world.

**IndUS Of Fox Valley**  
3600 N. Shawnee Ave.  
Appleton WI 54914

**IndUS of Fox Valley  
&  
Lawrence University**

*Present*

***Ustad Ken Zukerman***  
(Sarod)

&

***Ramdas Palsule***  
(Tabla)

**Saturday, April 30, 2011  
6:00 PM**

**Harper Hall**  
Lawrence University, Appleton