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FEATURED

## Nearly 8,000 People Stream into Balboa Park as India Celebrations Light Up San Diego

India-West Staff Reporter Oct 31, 2019

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A glimpse of the crowd that attended the India celebrations organized by the San Diego Indian American Society, founded 3 years ago by Indian American Prof. M.C. "Madhu" Madhavan. (Pacific Photographic Society photo)

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — In historic Balboa Park, on Oct. 19, thousands of San Diegans came together to celebrate a host of marquee events: the 12th annual Festival of Lights, 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhiji, fifth annual Navaratri celebrations, and the 550<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Guru Nanakji. One of the largest citywide festivals, it was attended by an estimated 8,000 people throughout the day with almost half of them staying in the Organ Pavilion to the very end.

The air in the park was filled with Indian fragrance and Indian oneness. Unity in diversity was seen in dress, language and food.

This annual event is organized by the San Diego Indian American Society, founded 36 years ago by Indian American Prof. M.C. “Madhu” Madhavan, to remember Gandhiji’s contribution to humankind. Since then the Society has awarded over \$1 million in scholarships to outstanding San Diego area high school graduates. Its goal is to familiarize the mainstream with Indian culture.

On Oct. 19, after the Indian and U.S. national anthems were sung by 25 women hailing from different states of India, Dr. Ramesh Rao, vice-president of SDIAS, welcomed the gathering.

The Diwali celebration was marked by 55 intricately carved brass lamps, varying in size and up to eight feet, representing different faiths, eras and regions of India, being lit, and concluding with a procession of 63 women from every state in India carrying 1008 small diyas.

The Navaratri celebrations began with an offering of India’s timeless traditional dances and classical music to the Universal One. There was a display of hundreds of bright, beautiful, handmade Indian dolls on a nine-step platform, the significance being the deepening of introspection for inner awakening. Long lines of people evinced keen interest in the exhibit and its spiritual significance.

In this special year of Gandhiji’s 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, a dance drama on his life from Mohandas to Mahatma, and a portrait exhibition, paid homage to the Father of the Nation.

A celebration of Guru Nanakji’s 550th birth anniversary brought to the fore the sense of oneness and unity that is India. The turban tying was popular with all.

Festival attendees also enjoyed their names written in four different Indian languages, wearing Sikh turbans and applying mehendi. Delicious food was available in the food court and was kept open till late evening. Children enjoyed games organized by Global Aims USA.

Sponsors and the over 300 volunteers were thanked for their support to create a magical event: emcee Akhila Rao, Shalini Pharam for choreographing Gandhiji's story, Neelu Bharadwaj curated the large lamps, Dr. Latha Sundar and Rama Ramsubramaniam coordinated the festival of dolls, and Jitu Patel directed lighting and sound. Madhavan and Hamid Daudani coordinated the festival. Sponsors were Gayatri Prahalad, Hema Lall, Aruna Garg, Kantha Patel, Manju Patel and Shital Parikh.