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## Record Crowds Flock to Holi 2010

Masala Radio attracts a record crowd of over 11,000 at Holi 2010 the 3rd annual Festival of Colours

HOUSTON: For the last 40 years, Indian-born parents have told the next generation stories of what Holi grand mela was like in India. Now, they can go to YouTube, type in Houston Holi, and relive it.

“Over 11,000 people gathered at the Festival of Colours this year” said Lt. Hines of Sugar Land Police. Vijay Pallod of The Hindus Of Greater Houston proclaimed “This is the Largest Holi in the US. And we were happy to see at least 5% were non-South Asian!” Pankaj Thakkar, owner of San Francisco’s Gold Palace exclaimed, “I flew to Houston just for Holi - there is no celebration like this in entire West Coast.” Holi 2010 rocked the Oyster Creek Park in Sugar Land on Sunday February 28th, from 11AM – 4PM, organized by Houston’s leading Indian Radio Show, Masala Radio 1480 AM, and pioneer community organizations Gujarati Samaj of Houston and Indian Culture Center. Three days prior, there was snow in Houston.

Then Sunday clouds disappeared forming the warmest day in 2010.

Thanks to generous support of Tara Energy, Jugal & Raj Malani of Ekal Vidyalay and The Village School, the event was completely free to the public with free admission, parking, and non-stop entertainment. The event was filled with subtle hints of progress, all the Food Court and Organizer booths has matching large name signs, colourful Holi signs lined the streets, sidewalks and the Color Zone thanking other major sponsors Star Plus, Tilak & Manu Agrawal, Brij & Sunita Agrawal, New York Life, Fommy.com, Hindus of Greater Houston, Telfair, Continental Airlines, and Qatar Airways.

As if an abundant supply of 6 shades of Holi powder was not enough, youths snuck past security to fill dollar-store pichkaris, water guns, and water bottles with river water to fully douse their friends. The magnificent park fountain was a magical fountain of youth, transforming adults into teenagers as they too played Holi. Kids forgot their electronic world as they raced through the free kids rides: a 65-ft obstacle course, 30-ft rock wall, giant slide, or the new



Masala Radio Crew at Holi 2010. Photo: Krishna Giri

addition – a mechanical bull. Next to the Kids rides was the Fiesta booth challenging kids with carnival games with free prizes.

“Come early to avoid lines at parking,” blared Masala Radio for 3 weeks. And come early they did, filling up nearly 1,000 seats by 12 noon. At 1:30 pm, Sugar Land Police’s Lt. Hines admitted that the parking lots had surpassed last year’s attendance. “Actually everything is full, including Cici’s, Kroger’s and even Randalls! As this event is approaching the Fourth of July crowds, we will recommend the city to open more parking at Lost Creek Park next year.”

From the Main Stage, the sea of people gave energy to the dancers and Emcee Sunil Thakkar. In between colourful dances, Thakkar mesmerized the audience with random requests of singing or dancing from the crowd itself. Thakkar orchestrated a Reddy Bread Roti Eating contest, and the audience was delighted when a frail looking girl won the contest in 40 seconds! Nara Lakhani of Sabse Bada Rupaiya and Glitz Entertainment’s Abhiya Malhotra choreographed the Sona Boutique Fashion Show with 2 rounds: Black & White Sari and Formal Wear. The Formal Wear models displayed over \$100,000 in dazzling diamond & precious stone jewellery by Maharaja Jewellers. Shivangini School of Dance presented three acts of vibrant folk dances, one to classical chants and tabla beats. Rhythm India rocked the stage with their modern glitzy costumes, adorable little girls, and stage covering groups of 20-40 students. Anjali Center for Performing Arts had the crowd dancing with the upbeat “Had-

Bollywood Shows 4 U, Robin Bains, CO-founder of Red Hot Karaoke, Immigration Attorney Deepa Thakur, and Malik Jamal of Tara Energy. Amid rousing applause Manik Joshi took first place and winning among several prizes a Masala Cruise to Mexico and a Free Red Hot Karaoke Machine. The stage closed with a captivating performance by Kamla Punjabi, and a DJ Party by Dholi Nish and DJ Neel, which went well past event hours.

The Gujarati Samaj of Houston’s President Prakash

tra offered garden style lunch with exclusive seating in the Pavilion, but most were happy to plop down anywhere and sample there tantalizing Chole and fresh, hot Baturas. New this year was Chipstix, a masaledaar fried potato sliced and twisted around a foot-and-a-half stick. Blue Bunny offered a variety of packaged ice creams, despite their difficult maintaining power. Fadi’s offered a different variety of falafels, Mediterranean salads and baklava. Neeta’s tempted the Gujarati’s with Surti Kichadi, Undhiyu and Papde No Lot, while Bengalis were drawn to O’Calcutta with mouthwatering Rasogulla. Even though there were twice as many food stalls as



Emcee and Masala Radio 1480 AM host Sunil Thakkar pops on and off stage catching audience off guard at Holi 2010.

dipa” followed by the whimsical “All is Well”. Their Bollywood Instructor Mahesh Mahbubani did a riveting impromptu dance lesson on stage with the entire Masala Crew, right down to the last booty-shaking steps. The full line up included Bengali Pride, Gitika Sinha & Group, Pearland Powers, Sugar Pear Group, Dhamaka, Anonymous, Bollywood School of Dance and Art, Arya Dance Academy, and Hybrid Rhythms.

The entertainment highlight was Houston Ka Music Muqabla, a singing competition of 6 contestants, 6 judges, in 3 rounds fashioned after the popular Star Plus show. Star Plus presented the competition and will air the episode, along with clips of the entire Holi celebration, on their channel in the next three weeks. For the first time in Houston, the crowd was invited to text their votes using technology provided by Saavn. Judging was by Rathna Kumar, founder Anjali Center for Performing Arts, Pandit Suman Ghosh, Moid Khan, founder of

Desai, Vice President Nisha Mirani, and Secretary Ajit Patel rendered a quick re-enactment of the Puranic story of ancient King Hiranyakashyap who wanted all wanted to burn his son Prahlad for worshipping Vishnu instead of the King. The King ordered Prahlad’s evil sister Holika (who had a boon of withstanding fire) into the fire, but Vishnu protected Prahlad and she was burned instead, displaying the triumph of Good over Evil. On stage, King Hiranyakashyap was over 10 feet tall and had fire shooting from his hands, a site to behold! The King exited the stage into the crowds, and was stopped every few feet for dozens of photos. Soon afterwards, ICC President Swapan Dhairyawan and Past President Keshu Patel led Consul General Sanjiv Arora to the stage who gave an unusually short welcome and pledge of better service to his Houston constituents.

Aroma from the Holi Food Court filled the air as long lines formed at Udipi Cafe, Madras Pavilion, and Mantra of Sugar Land. Man-

last year, most everyone sold out, especially AlpaHar Foods. Owner Alpa Parmar, who doesn’t have a restaurant nor caters, when asked why she did the booth for Holi said, “Food is my passion, and I love making people happy at Holi.”

First-time attendees like Pankaj Malani were overwhelmed, “I was very impressed by how organized the Holi event was. It was a great opportunity to see kids and adults from our community enjoying themselves together on this festive occasion. The dances, skits and variety of food definitely added to the fun atmosphere. “The entire event was directed by Masala Radio owners Sunil and Sandhya Thakkar, and coordinated by Event Manager Shilpi Sheth. What’s Next? Masala Radio is scouting for venues that can support over 10,000 for its next event, Diwali 2010, the Festival of Lights. For details stay tuned to Masala Radio 1480AM Saturdays and Sundays 10AM – 5PM, call 281-277-6874 or visit [www.masalaradio.net](http://www.masalaradio.net).