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Festival marks renewal of life
Thousands enjoy music, dance and food at Diwali in Cary

BY THOMASI MCDONALD, Staff Writer

CARY - Gray skies could not dim the rich music and dance, tasty food and vibrant colors that swirled through Saturday's ninth-annual Cary Diwali Festival.

Diwali, the festival of lights, lit up hearts and spirits of the thousands of people who attended the all-day event, which is the most popular of festivals from India.

By sunset, folks were still streaming into the amphitheater to see two "Indian Idol" TV stars, Aditi Paul and Sandeep Archarya, the 2006 winner of his country's "American Idol" counterpart.

"It's a major festival in India," said Mamta Bisarya, a festival volunteer who moved to the United States from northern India 30 years ago. "Back home, it's celebrated for five days in every city. For us to hold it here reminds of us home."

Pankaj Jain, an N.C. State religion and philosophy professor, said Diwali represents the renewal of life and the victory of good over evil, after the ancient king Rama defeated his nemesis, Ravana. In Hinduism, the people of Rama's kingdom light rows of lamps to celebrate his homecoming.

The Cary festival cuts across religious and language boundaries. All are welcome: Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, all faiths. "It's a celebration for all of India," Jain said.

Diwali gives first-generation Indians an opportunity to hold on to their traditions, and it helps them introduce those traditions to children born in the United States.



From left, Divya Jha, Vandana Jindal, Pooja Basu and Shweta Surana dance during the performance of "Indian Idol" winner Sandeep Acharya.
Ray Black III for The Cary News

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The event is also a means to introduce aspects of Indian culture to other Americans: sumptuous food, colorful clothing, ornate jewelry, arts and history.

Before the "Indian Idols" took to the stage, the thousands in attendance were treated to an array of traditional and popular dance and music from more than 600 area youngsters.


Nidhi Godthi, a Fuller Elementary fifth-grader, was still in dance costume while tie-dyeing a cloth square at one of the exhibition booths.

"It's not the first time I have come to the festival, but it's the first time I've danced," said Nidhi, 10.

The festival theme was "Padharo Mhare Des" -- welcome to the vibrant state of Rajasthan. Rajasthan is a desert land that borders Pakistan. Jain, the NCSU professor, noted that India played host to Alexander the Great; St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus; the ancient Hebrews after the second fall of the temple; the Chinese and Japanese who visited the country to learn Buddhism and Zoroastrians fleeing persecution in Persia.

"India has always been a welcoming place," he said.

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