

Youth Corner!

“The youth of Maharashtra are the key to our future...” (anonymous).

In July of 2009, Maharashtra Mandal in Philadelphia hosted a convention where a number of talented artists from across the globe performed. This convention was a huge success, thanks to the efforts of numerous people, and I think that it was an especially intriguing experience for teens. As a first-timer at the last convention, I had the amazing opportunity to attend this four day show, and I learned so much from my experience. The convention has a variety of appealing activities available to youth, like Dance workshops, Speed-dating workshops, SaReGaMaPa show star performances, Marathi dramas (Divasa Tu Ratri Mee and Avagha Ranga Eka chi zhala and even a performance by Asha Bhosle) Below, I have enclosed a few journal entries chronicling the weekend event and my reflections on it.

The vibrant color, energy and liveliness are what make this nation a truly spectacular retreat. With each visit, I bring with me another special memory. I break off a branch of the country’s rich culture tree and try to decipher it. What do I discover? India.

Even though I try to treasure the Indian heritage I have so come to love, I have found, to my disappointment that I really don’t know much about the very nation my parents grew up in. However, when I first learned we were going to the convention in Philadelphia, it was with a mixed emotion of joy and disappointment. Joy, because it was a chance to study the Indian culture in a way I’d never done before; disappointment, because it wasn’t exactly a “cool” vacation, according to my friends. After all, it wasn’t as if I was embarking on an adventure on a roller coaster! When my mom first asked me whether I really wanted to go or not, I merely shrugged unenthusiastically. At the time, I had no real expectations from the convention, and I definitely didn’t realize that it would be an unforgettable opportunity that I would remember forevermore.

Day 1: July 3rd Friday

I awoke with a jumpstart. Alert and awake, I was ready for the day to begin! The night before had been a long one because we had driven about 583 miles (not that I was counting...) to our hotel. Hurriedly, I prepared for the long day ahead.

By 7:30 AM, we were all out and ready – especially Aai, who was especially excited for the breakfast in store for us. According to what I’d read, we would be offered a traditional

Marathi meal. It sounded delightful! Before I left, however, I grabbed the lanyard with my “credentials”. The prospect of strolling downtown Philly with a lanyard on, in a luxurious building was enough to make my head spin dreamily. Later, I was surprised to find that everyone had on the “credentials”, which was merely a pass to enter the building. Nevertheless, our first meal was awaiting us as we entered the large building. I had hoped that we could spend the first few minutes exploring the building, but lo and behold, we found a large crowd awaiting us near the cafeteria doors. Unfortunately, a giant mass of people was anxiously waiting to enter the line. So we joined it and ended up waiting for nearly ten minutes for breakfast. I was about to stroll in, when a man stopped me. Dressed in normal apparel, I would have never guessed that he was one of the many committee members, whose efforts for organizing the event were never appreciated enough. I imagined how difficult an endeavor it would have been to plan and put together such a large event. It was extraordinary! He stamped my card’s breakfast label for July 3rd, 2009. The minute I entered the large cafeteria, I felt as if I’d stepped into a chaotic Indian restaurant – correction – a **huge** chaotic Indian restaurant. People shouted to their wives while husbands and children pushed to get to the front of the line. Others impatiently strolled by, unable to mutter a simple “excuse me”. Nonetheless, I decided that if I was aiming to get the ultimate experience, I would have to accept the craziness. And this was just the beginning.....

The breakfast which my mother had so eagerly and impatiently awaited was indeed delicious. To start with, we enjoyed “Saboodana Khichidi”, a dish of Topeka served with yogurt. After the Indian specialty, there was also an assortment of English breakfast foods – pastries, cereal and muffins. A sip of orange juice somehow seemed to be the perfect finishing touch.

After breakfast, we learned that the welcome ceremony was to begin any minute. By 8 AM, thousands of Maharashtrians from coast to coast began filing into the giant auditorium. We began searching for our assigned seats, listed by letter and number, but it seemed hopeless at first. I thought it would take an eon before everyone would finally settle down! Before long, the children’s’ band thundered in. Immediately, a rainbow of silken sheets fluttered past my eyes as the vigorous pounding of drums met my ears. Children waved flags, representing their own states while representing Maharashtra. The whole time, a wonderful harmony filled the room as people from all fifty states joined in the parade. I thought, “Let the games begin!”

After the parade, there was a long speech announced in Marathi, which I didn’t understand completely. In essence, it seemed a way to welcome the Maharashtrian community to the three day event and honor the region for its rich culture and diversity. After that, everyone departed and moved different ways. It was almost as if it was a race to the finish line. Crowds poured out of the stadium.

Wondering what the next show was, we checked our schedules. To our surprise, there were many choices of programs. We could relax in poise at the Yoga Workshop, enjoy a Magic show, explore the building in a scavenger hunt or view a show, Geet Ramayan. All of us immediately decided on Geet Ramayan. It not only sounded interesting, but it was also a show put together by our own Maharashtrian Mandal of Detroit, which made me all the more excited to view it. Thus, we set off to our first destination, a feeling of excitement running through my veins.

Geet Ramayan really was a very entertaining program. Well arranged and carried, the play narrated the classic story of Ram, Sita, and Hanuman, among other deities. To put it in general terms, it plotted good versus evil. What made it particularly engaging, though, was the cast of the performance. In truth, the music and skillful acting of the performers made it a must-see show. The story was well known, passed on from generation to generation. Perhaps, I thought, my generation was the first to have a vague understanding of the story. After the show, I walked away with a sense of understanding which I hadn't had before. Maybe it was a realization of Indian culture. When we were about halfway through the show, we realized that lunch had already begun. Careful not to disturb the audience or performers, we headed toward the cafeteria for lunch.

The Peshwaii meal was a delicious blend of spices, consisting of dishes from a specific region within Maharashtra. Rows and rows of "chapattis", trays' brimming with freshly prepared specialty vegetable dishes, rice and dessert was just enough to make my mouth water. An enticing aroma filled the room, and soon, I was dying to start eating. I scooped up spoonfuls of each vegetable and grabbed a couple of "chapattis". Next, we scanned the scope for any familiar faces. No luck. "Perhaps they were deeper in," I judged. Soon enough, we came across the Vale's, and decided to eat with them. At the table, the kids, Shounak and Omkar, were scraping their plates clean. Even so, I took my time and savored every spoon.

To get the most of our "culture experience", we spent the rest of the afternoon choosing programs of our liking. It was a little frustrating at first, because there was just so much to choose from! From Warali Painting and drawing workshops to movies to unique plays and moving music performances, there was an endless variation of events at our disposal. I was first intent upon attending Tarunai, in which popular singers from SaReGaMaPa show would be performing a medley of tunes. Being the huge SaReGaMaPa fan that I am, I was so excited to attend this exclusive concert. As I was skimming the schedule, however, I spotted a drama, called Avagha Ranga, occurring at the same time as Tarunai. Dilemma # 1! My parents had heard that the play was really worth seeing. Plus, people in India hadn't even seen it yet! For once, I laughed, I would be able to see something and tell my grandparents about a play, rather than the other way around. It was such a difficult decision that I was torn between the two shows completely! After all, both were programs I couldn't miss! In the end, I decided to see Avagha Ranga, the drama, which turned out to be the best show ever!

Friday's dinner was imported straight from Kolhapur. We savored the Mattha, Usal, mirchi bhajji and chapattis. For dessert, a delicious orange tangy-sweet dessert was laid out neatly. I couldn't help but smuggle two jilebis before we exited the building for good. And who knew what surprise show the next day would bring. Stay Tuned!

..... TO BE CONTINUED..... next week.

*****Thanks for reading! *****

We want to hear from you! If you are a Marathi youth who has been to a really cool Maharashtrian event/program, please share your experience! If you would like to publish your thoughts, I would be more than happy to publish it in the next edition of the "Youth Corner" Just email your description to: supriya1111@yahoo.com. Hope to hear about your experiences soon! ☺

~Supriya Jalukar