

NOVEMBER 5, 2023



Cultural Edition



Not featuring Aanvi Goyal

PRESIDENT'S CORNER By Aarya Shah

I have been volunteering with TIPS JVP since the 2014 Easter Basket project, and since then, I have grown much closer with my San Antonio Indian community and always look forward to our monthly projects where I get to spend time with my old friends as well as meet some new ones. Over the years, this organization has impacted me in so many ways by teaching me the meaning of volunteering and how it is important for our community as well as leadership skills that I will use for the rest of my life. This year, I hope I am able to give back to TIPS JVP for all it has done for me. As president, I will foster this bonding within our community as we take on projects to support our city and show our younger members how fun volunteering can be, so they will look forward to our projects as much as I did when I was their age.

I am super excited for this upcoming year and hope to continue our new volunteering partnerships with organizations like Book Buddies and Kinetic Kids, as well as create new ones to diversify our volunteering activities. I also want to promote TIPS JVP community engagement through our newsletters by encouraging all of the members to submit pieces so we can have a broader view of thoughts and opinions on our themes.

Lastly, I present to you: Volume 6, Issue 1 of the TIPS JVP Newsletter on Culture. I hope you enjoy!

VOLUME 6
ISSUE 1

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Newsletter Highlights

President's Corner

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and Heritage on American
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AKKA: PRESERVING INDIAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE ON AMERICAN SOIL

By Arpitha Kadaba



The Association of Kannada Kootas of America, fondly known as AKKA, stands as a vibrant testament to the enduring spirit of Indian culture and heritage flourishing in the United States. Founded in 2000, AKKA has grown into a dynamic organization that unites Kannadigas, the people from the Indian state of Karnataka, across America. Through its myriad activities, AKKA not only connects the Kannada diaspora but also showcases the rich cultural tapestry of India, contributing to the preservation and propagation of our age-old heritage.

India is a mosaic of cultures, languages, and traditions, and AKKA celebrates this diversity with zeal. The association's annual conventions are a spectacular display of the multifaceted Indian culture, with participants from various regions coming together to share their unique traditions. From classical dance performances to folk music recitals, from traditional attire showcases to culinary extravaganzas, these conventions immerse attendees in a rich tapestry of Indian experiences. It exemplifies the notion that unity in diversity is not just a catchphrase but a way of life.

Language is one of the most integral components of culture, and AKKA recognizes this fact. The association promotes the Kannada language through various initiatives, encouraging younger generations to connect with their roots. Kannada literary events, poetry readings, and language workshops are a regular feature of AKKA's activities, fostering a deep appreciation for the language and its literary heritage. By preserving and promoting Kannada, AKKA contributes to the preservation of a vital part of Indian culture.

The arts are a cornerstone of Indian culture, and AKKA places a strong emphasis on nurturing artistic talents. The association provides a platform for budding artists and performers to showcase their skills in music, dance, drama, and other forms of creative expression. This not only supports these artists in their artistic pursuits but also ensures that traditional Indian art forms continue to thrive on American soil. Moreover, it allows the wider community to appreciate the depth and beauty of these art forms.

One of AKKA's most significant contributions to preserving Indian culture and heritage is fostering cultural exchange. The association regularly collaborates with other Indian cultural organizations, enabling a cross-pollination of traditions and ideas. This exchange not only enriches the experiences of members but also promotes a greater understanding of the diversity within Indian culture. It serves as a microcosm of the cultural exchange that has been a hallmark of India for centuries.

In addition to celebrating and preserving culture, AKKA is deeply committed to community service. The association actively participates in philanthropic activities, supporting charitable causes both in India and the United States. This commitment to service reflects the values of compassion and selflessness ingrained in Indian culture. It reminds us that our cultural heritage is not just about tradition and celebration but also about the responsibility to give back to society.

The Association of Kannada Kootas of America, or AKKA, is a shining example of how Indian culture and heritage can flourish on foreign shores. Through its diverse range of activities, AKKA not only preserves and propagates the essence of Karnataka and India but also fosters unity, understanding, and appreciation among people from all walks of life. As we celebrate AKKA's achievements, we are reminded that the Indian diaspora is not just preserving its roots but also enriching the cultural fabric of the countries they call home. AKKA embodies the idea that culture knows no boundaries and that it can thrive anywhere with dedication, passion, and a sense of community.

INTERVIEW

By Neel Mittal and Aanvi Goyal

Vijaya Botla is one of the founders of City Diwali, and this year will be her fifteenth year organizing this event. She expresses her love for Indian culture by giving back to the community through this event.

Why did you decide to help organize Diwali San Antonio?

I have always been involved in community events, especially in my Indian community. When my friend Kausi Subramaniam asked me to get involved with Diwali San Antonio, I immediately agreed to do it along with her, Dr. Viswanathan, and his wife Hema Viswanathan. We started Anuja SA which is a 501(c)(3) organization to help foster the sister-city relationship between San Antonio and Chennai, India. That started, and now in 15 years, Diwali San Antonio is bigger and better, and it is amazing how that happened.

What things do you do inside the organizing committee to plan the event?

It takes a tremendous amount of work. The first year that it happened we expected maybe 100 people to show up, and almost 5000 people showed up at the Arneson River Theater. We just had a few dances there and some fireworks after that, but it got to a point where the fire marshals couldn't let more people in. In general, there are so many moving parts. People always think that a festival happens in the last month or two, but really a week or two after Diwali is done, we are already talking about next year, and how to do it. It is not something that happens at the last minute -- to do something really well, it takes a lot of organization and planning, especially figuring out logistics, finding vendors, finding sponsors, working with the city, and decor. It takes a lot of work and it feels like a lot of moving parts, but it all comes together at the end. Volunteers make a huge difference. I know that TIPS JVP has been

involved in the past. It is a grassroots event but it has grown because of great organizational skills.

How did Diwali San Antonio start?

It started in 2008 as a way to celebrate the sister city agreement between San Antonio and Chennai because San Antonio thought "What can we do to celebrate this?," and you know San Antonio loves to throw parties. Think about Fiesta and all these other festivals that we already have, so we thought it would be great to do an Indian festival and that's why we chose Diwali, the festival of lights, because we thought it would just be beautiful for this time of the year to celebrate it here. And like I said, it's just something that makes us feel very proud that, even though the Indian community is not necessarily the largest populations in San Antonio, this festival is probably one of the most attended by non-Indians in the city, which really makes me proud as an Indian.

What does Diwali mean to you?

I came here in the 1970s to the United States. Back then, the Indian population was really small. So, it was just more something that was religious within our own nuclear family, like me, my parents and my sister, so I just remembered we had to clean our rooms and help clean the house (which I didn't think was that fun). My mom made all of these Indian desserts like foods that were very special at that time. For us, it was a once-a-year thing, where we got to buy brand new clothes, which didn't have to be Indian, but I remember I bought my first pair of Guess jeans for Diwali. So it was those kinds of memories, kind of a good mix of Indian and Western memories that I have. Over time though, that has grown. We didn't have access to a lot of Indian things like Indian grocery stores and Indian clothing stores, so we really had to make do with what we had. And I think now, I wanted to make that more prevalent by really celebrating it more, especially with my own children.

Meet and Greet By Neerja Bathla

On Saturday, October 28, 2023, the TIPS Junior Volunteer Program members came together for a meet and greet and community service project. For the meet and greet portion, the TIPS JVP leaders introduced themselves and all of the junior members did icebreaker activities to get to know each other better. For the volunteer project, we made over sixty Thanksgiving placemats for Meals on Wheels, an organization that delivers meals to the older and disabled members of the greater San Antonio community, to be delivered with a Thanksgiving meal later this November. This project was a fun one, and one that we look forward to doing every year, but until then, we are excited to keep doing volunteer work for various charitable organizations across San Antonio!

