



INDO-AMERICAN CENTER

The mission of the Indo-American Center is to promote the well-being of South Asian Americans through services that facilitate their adjustment, integration, and friendship with the wider society, nurture their sense of community, and foster appreciation for their heritage and culture.

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Open daily 10am-5pm, closed Tues.

News & Events, Fall 2005

Maximum City, Maximum Event: IAC Annual Fundraiser, Sunday, October 16, 2005

Mark your calendars for the evening of **Sunday, October 16, 2005**. That's when Pulitzer Prize finalist Suketu Mehta, author of *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, will be the keynote speaker at the **Indo-American Center's annual fundraising dinner**, a don't-miss event that promises to be lively, stimulating, and fun.

In addition to being a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize, Mehta's sprawling memoir about the city of his childhood, "narrative reporting at its finest, probably the best work of nonfiction to come out of India in recent years," according to the *New York Times Book Review*, was chosen as one of the ten best books of 2004 by *India Today*.

Mehta was 14 when his father, who was in the diamond industry, moved his family to New York. With the classic immigrant's aching yearning for "home," he writes that he "missed

Bombay like an organ of my body." On his return visits "the terrain is littered with memory mines."

With the perspective of the newcomer and the understanding of the native born, Mehta creates a kaleidoscopic portrait of the wonder and the horror that is Mumbai. He explores the life of the city he loves, chronicling day to day problems of setting up residence, daring forays with the city's tough police chief into its criminal underworld of Hindu and Muslim gangs and amoral hitmen, conversations with Bal Thackeray, the leader of the Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena party, hilarious antics of aging male movie stars on the set of *Mission Kashmir*, a Bollywood movie he co-wrote, stories from the shacks of slum dwellers and from the glitzy salons of the rich and powerful.



This is without doubt the standout event of the season, so send in your reservations early. Anyone with ties to Mumbai or to diverse, densely populated cities will find this evening with Suketu Mehta fascinating-- truly a maximum experience.

An Addition to the Family

The Indo-American Center is abuzz with enthusiasm, fresh ideas, and new energy as the Leadership 21 Board (L21), the Center's version of the traditional Junior Board, joins the IAC family this year. Created to encourage the development of future Center leadership, L21 is a dynamic group of young South Asian professionals who will support the work of the Center and play a vital role in shaping its future.

The L21 Board has hit the ground running, taking responsibility for the eight-week 2005 Summer Fun children's program and for volunteer recruitment.

"What I like about my experience so far with the Center is simply the openness to fresh and new ideas," says Rakhi Patel, a planning and marketing associate at La Rabida Children's Hospital. "The Summer Fun program

has been a huge success, and we've had a waiting list of children wishing to participate. Not only have the kids left with wonderful memories and new friends, but they also have developed relationships with the volunteers and leaders who also serve as role models/mentors."

It is evident from the dedication and commitment of L21 members that IAC's future is indeed in good hands.

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ESL Classes: New Coordinator, New Ideas

“First listen, then try to speak, then try to read, then try to write.” According to IAC’s new literacy coordinator, Himali Bharucha, these are the guidelines set out for students of English as a second language (ESL). Himali, state certified for both bilingual and substitute teaching, has been busy revamping the Center’s ESL program using fresh materials and new ideas to help non-English speakers achieve literacy and communicate in English.

Letters of the alphabet, simple words and colorful pictures dance along the walls of the classrooms, inviting even the shyest of students to sound them out. Students are tested when they join the program and placed in the class level that matches their ability. Students in the first level learn to recognize consonants and vowels and the sounds they make. A standardized test 60 days later assesses whether they are ready to move on to the next level, where they begin to learn basic grammar, punctuation, and long and short vowel sounds.

“Our teachers are bilingual, so most of our students can communicate with us if they are stuck,” says Himali. “But for our students from Russia and the Middle East the charts and pictures are a great help.”

The next standardized assessment test indicates whether students have progressed to the conversational English level where they will try to master the intricacies of spoken English. Himali hopes to introduce a drama session so that students can act out simple stories to help them gain confidence in speaking their new language. Approximately 200 students are enrolled in the classes, which are held daily from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. One-on-one instruction is also available if needed.

Common Concerns, Different Responses

Accompanied by chanting of the *Maneesha Panchakam* by Asha Murthy, Bharatanatyam dancer Sonal Adhikari portrayed Adi Shankara’s recognition of the presence of the divine in all human beings. Swahili Institute of Chicago (SWITCH) storyteller Simba Tayari, aided by Jifunze Kiswahili students, presented a vivid account of *Shauri Yako: The Ungrateful Baboon*, a tale of the consequences of failing to respect others. The rhythm of African drums punctuated a presentation of proverbs about the concept of respect in both African-American and Asian Indian cultures. It was yet another program in the “Common Concerns, Different Responses” series sponsored by the Field Museum’s Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC). Lively discussion about how experience influences the values we hold and the stories we tell followed presentations at the Indo-American Center on March 12. This year’s theme was “Telling Tales to Teach,” and over 200 participants discovered afresh the power of story to instruct and entertain.

The program was developed by IAC’s Cultural Heritage Committee members Sonal Adhikari, Mannan Bandukwala, Nafisa Bandukwala, Basanti Banerji, Harpreet Datt, Lakshmi Menon, Asha Murthy, Ralph Nicholas, Padma Rangaswamy, B. S. Subbakrishna, and Dorothea Shah, and Simba Tayari of SWITCH with the advice and assistance of CCUC anthropologist Mario Longoni.



IAC volunteer Sadhna Agarwal helps students from the Swahili Institute light the lamp at the start of the Field Museum Cultural Connections program.

Award Winning Citizenship Instructor Bids Classes Farewell

Mr. Samson Macwan, Citizenship Class Instructor at the Indo-American Center since 1998, capped his career assisting 682 immigrants to become U.S. citizens with enthusiastic participation in the New Americans Initiative conducted by IAC in conjunction with the Albany Park Neighborhood Council. IAC's beloved teacher has skillfully guided more than 1064 students toward U.S. citizenship by helping them master basic facts about the U.S. government that are required for U.S. citizenship.

An immigrant from Ahmedabad, India, where he had been a commercial officer for an English company, Samson Macwan came to the U.S. in 1993 to live near his son, a

neonatologist, in Peoria, IL. His desire to assist newly arrived immigrants prompted his settling in Chicago's Devon area. In 1997 he began to volunteer at the Indo-American Center and was recruited to teach English and then Civics classes. In 1999, Samson was honored in Springfield with the Governor's Award as the Best Title V Employee of the Year. He subsequently received the 2003 City of Chicago Asian American Heritage Award and the 2005 Indian Christian Federation of the Midwest Award in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the community.

In June 2005, at age 78, he finally followed his physician's advice to retire, but he remains active as a Lay

Leader at the Immanuel Methodist Church in Evanston where he frequently preaches at Gujarati services. He also continues to assist new arrivals from India with temporary shelter in his home and with support from the Macwan Foundation, which he established to help needy Asian Indians in Chicago.



A Helping Hand: IAC's Public Benefits Assistance

Help is at hand for families and individuals in need of transitional or long-term support. Through referrals and linkages with other neighboring community services, the Social Security Administration, the Chicago Departments on Aging and Public Health, and the Access Community Healthcare Network, IAC's benefits

coordinator, Minaxi Shah, works to secure support with the least amount of red tape, and provides other assistance including transportation, translation and advocacy.

Food stamps, financial assistance, medical assistance, health care insurance for children through Kid

Care, and Social Security based benefits are among the many services available to help start needy immigrant families and other limited English-speaking persons in Illinois on the road to good health, well-being and economic self-sufficiency.

Cultural Diversity Alliance

The Indo-American Center recently joined more than a dozen other Chicago ethnic institutions to form a Cultural Diversity Alliance. The consortium of museums, cultural centers, and historical societies is dedicated to promoting the value and public understanding of cultural diversity.

The alliance will

- Develop a dialogue to promote public understanding of the value of diversity in building healthy communities
- Share and leverage institutional resources for educational programs, public exhibitions, promotions, and

events with public/private institutions

- Address issues of change and transformation in local communities and advocate on public policy issues of mutual concern for alliance members
- Design educational diversity programming for youth, families, schools, and general audiences
- Promote tourism in the region through marketing campaigns that highlight local ethnic communities
- Offer mentoring services, professional development programming, and technical support

- Assist member organizations regarding facility management issues and resource sharing
- Create awareness and raise the general profile of member organizations.

Cultural Heritage Committee volunteers Nafisa and Mannan Bandukwala, Lakshmi Menon, and Dorothea Shah have energetically promoted participation of the Indo-American Center in the Alliance, which they believe will provide valuable assistance in achieving IAC's mission.

Every Day's a Party for IAC Seniors

It must be Sunday: The Senior Milan group is spread out across the IAC auditorium, arms outstretched, totally focused on their yoga position.

Now that the Center's popular Senior Milan program has been expanded from two days a week to every day, there's yoga on Sundays, games and crafts on Mondays and learning about other cultures on Wednesdays. Health workshops on Thursdays offer flu shots, mammograms and presentations on nutrition and other topics of interest. Light exercise on Fridays and a potluck lunch, recipe exchange and monthly birthday celebration on Saturdays bring the week to a close.

Coordinator Gita Chawla maintains a full schedule of activities for the group. "I post the schedule of events for the week," she says, "and even if the program changes, everyone comes. They enjoy the get-togethers so much." At present Indian Garden and Udipi Palace restaurants provide free lunch on Wednesdays and Thursdays. "The seniors are here from 10 to 3, so if we

could get lunch for the other days it would be a great help," says Gita. "And if we could get funding for transportation we could take them to so many places they would otherwise never see. They love outings."



Senior Milan sessions offer companionship and conversation

A trip to the Shedd Aquarium with the youngsters from the Summer Fun program has been the highlight of their forays outside the Center. Transportation and admission were

provided by the Shedd. The group is eagerly anticipating a picnic on the beach and a trip to the Brookfield Zoo.

Meanwhile, they launch enthusiastically into rounds of word games like *anthakshari* to develop English language skills, perform regional dances and learn about customs, costumes and cuisines of other cultures. In addition to the 50 participants from South Asia, seniors from Mexico and Malaysia have also joined the group.

"They love our food and our music," Gita says, "and our people explain the songs to them."

Coming up next in the Milan program is an art project. The Open Book Peace Project instructors will bring supplies and help seniors to make books that they can use as journals. Considering the good time they seem to be having, the journals are sure to make for lively reading!

IAC Volunteers Recruit New US Citizens



Executive Director Chris Zala and helpers hoist the New Americans Initiative banner as IAC launches collaboration in the citizenship drive.

In collaboration with the Albany Park Neighborhood Council and World Relief, the Indo-American Center is participating in the New Americans Initiative to assist 2500 legal permanent residents of West Ridge and Albany Park neighborhoods to become citizens during the next three years. IAC volunteers, who speak Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati, knock on doors, talk to community residents, and converse with community leaders to achieve this goal to benefit legal immigrants.

Already in 2005 over 250 new applications for citizenship have been completed thanks to IAC participation in this project. Those who learn English and become United States citizens increase their annual family income. They may vote and express their views about government policies and decisions. U.S. citizenship protects immigrants from deportation and permits extended travel outside the U.S. They may also sponsor petitions from their relatives to immigrate to the United States.

Assistant Director Joins Indo-American Center Staff

Susan Patel, who is completing her Master's thesis on curriculum focusing on English as a Second Language (ESL), has come on board as Assistant to the Executive Director at the Indo-American Center.

She has taught ESL to both adults and children. She was a sixth grade math and science teacher at Chicago International Charter School Basil Campus on Chicago's south side.

In addition to working in business Susan has also worked with the Southeast Asia Center, a non-profit community organization in Chicago's Uptown Neighborhood.

Kathak Dance Classes at Indo-American Center

Sundays from 3 to 5 p.m.

\$15.00 per session



Ambika Razdan, former IAC Kathak instructor, displays her skill for an appreciative audience at the Field Museum in Chicago

Anila Sinha Foundation and *Kathak Nrityakala Kendra* conduct dance classes for aspiring beginners and intermediate dance students of all ages.

Kathak is one of the five major forms of classical Indian dance. "Katha" which means "story telling" developed centuries ago in north Indian temples as a vehicle for presenting ancient myths and legends. During the Mughul era Kathak became a popular entertainment in the royal courts. A revival of both the traditional temple narrative mode and

exploration of rhythm and movement requiring virtuosity in intricate footwork has occurred during the last century, and is nurtured by dance academies like *Kathak Nrityakala Kendra*.

For More Information, please call: 847-985-9142, Or visit www.Asfkathak.com

Federal Work Study Interns Augment IAC Program Staff

Assistance of several interns from Loyola University of Chicago has been vital in conducting activities at the Indo-American Center.

Naitek Patel, who graduated last June, worked with the Summer

Fun program before going off to medical school at Southern Illinois University.

Through a Federal Work Study Program, university students offer individual homework help and

mentor youth. Current Loyola interns include: Mital Dave, Mohammed Moolji, Nisar Naimi, Maheen Sheik, and Shabhir Syed Ali.

Youth Tutoring at the Indo-American Center

4:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday

10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday

Community Service Learning Volunteers Assist Staff

Among the many faces one encounters at the Indo-American Center are those of young people from area schools including: North Side College Preparatory School, Prosser Career Academy, Amundsen, Lane Tech Sullivan, and Von Steuben High Schools,

who are earning community service learning credit by doing helpful tasks for IAC staff. From filing and record keeping to assisting seniors learning to use computers, these young people are contributing to the welfare of the community and learning by

interacting with the immigrant population at the Indo-American Center. Center staff members are responsible for supervising these willing workers and submitting reports to their high schools where they receive credit, which is essential for graduation.

DeVry Technical Institute Shares Talent and Person-Power with IAC

Through a special technical assistance program offered by DeVry Institute three young people were instrumental in installing a new computer system at the Indo-American Center.

Francisco Acosta, Steve Lavengco, and Pamela Villena spent many hours manipulating technical challenges to establish up-to-date internet access and functioning computers in all

offices as well as the computer lab where community residents may enroll in classes to acquire basic computer skills.

Computer Classes

12:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday

2:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday

Excursions Brighten and Broaden Seniors' Lives

The popularity of field trips with Indo-American Center seniors is guiding future planning. Several destinations are on the agenda for the coming months:

- Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum
- The Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago
- The National Vietnam Veterans Museum
- The Museum of Contemporary Art
- The Mitchell Museum of the American Indian
- The DuSable Museum of African American Culture.

Recent senior excursions included:

- Senior Festival at McCormick Place
- Lincoln Park Partnership Walk and Lincoln Park Conservatory
- The Mexican Fine Arts Museum
- Passport to India Program at Chicago Children's Museum
- Museum of Science and Industry
- Albany Park Neighborhood Council Affordable Housing Rally
- Peace and Harmony Month Address by Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi at Skokie Public Library. The is event was organized by the Gandhi Memorial Trust Fund, the village of Skokie, The Skokie Public Library.

Sharing Our Stories

Indo-American Center Instructors, Students, and Volunteers Interact with Visitors

The murmur of lively small group conversations filled the main hall at IAC during the highlight of an afternoon workshop for faculty members from Illinois Valley Community College on May 23 when several literacy and civics students joined instructors and Cultural Heritage Committee volunteers to answer questions about their experiences growing up in India and coming as immigrants to the United States. The interviewers learned about the variety of immigrants working and studying at the Indo-American Center.

Minaxi Shah, educated as a Chemical Engineer in India, is enthusiastically teaching English at IAC.

Not only has civics teacher Samson Macwan assisted over 1000 immigrants in learning basics of U.S. government so that they could become American citizens, but he has also established a foundation, which provides monetary assistance to needy

immigrants.

Nadia Fazal is diligently preparing for her naturalization exam. Obtaining her citizenship may expedite her husband's arrival in the U. S. with their infant son. She likes being able to go out on her own in Chicago without an escort, but in Chicago as in Lahore, she observes the annual month long dawn to dusk fast of Ramadan.

B.S. Subbkrishna's upbringing in a Brahmin Hindu home included an engagement arranged by parents long before he and his wife knew about it; they have now been happily wed for over fifty years. Their American born son chose an Asian Indian wife after dating a variety of women in the U.S.

Happie Datt was surprised by the racism she encountered when she came as a student to Florida in 1971. However, she enjoys the freedom she found in America where she met a Hindu man she married despite her Sikh parents' reservations.

At the April 29th Ethnic Neighborhood Orientation session, third grade students from North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School learned how delighted Nadia and Shazia Fazal are with their marriages, arranged by their parents. Shazia told the boys and girls that she enjoys riding on CTA buses and trains in Chicago where she easily finds a seat and is not hassled by young men.

Suleman Nathani, an instructor who also works at the immigration desk at IAC, was born in a Muslim household in Gujarat, India. He told the children about his adventures joining several groups in the U.S. including Mormons and the Baha'i's in his search for religious truth.

Cooperation of staff and Indo-American Center program participants provides remarkable opportunities for IAC visitors to learn about the diversity within the South Asian immigrant community.

“India Showcase” at John G. Shedd Aquarium

The rousing beat of Bhangra marked by a Dholi (drummer) greeted visitors at the entrance to the Shedd Aquarium on August 6 when a hundred Indo-American Center seniors and youth with free passes joined other visitors during one of a series of events highlighting Chicago's ethnic communities in “Celebrating Communities and Cultures” honoring the Aquarium's 75th anniversary. IAC program participants were thrilled with a chance to explore the coral reef, watch beluga whales breach, and applaud the dolphin show.

Organized by the Cultural Heritage Education Committee (CHEC) of the Indo-American Center with collaboration of the Punjabi Cultural Society and Chicago Tamil Sangam, “INDIA SHOWCASE” at the Shedd welcomed visitors with a traditional rangoli design created by Meena Subramanian and offered names written in Gujarati or Tamil and “temporary (mehendi) tattoos.” Dr. Mehgil Pholi-Singh conducted a yoga session. A program in Phelps Auditorium included a Bharatanatyam dance performance by Maryann

Manatt, a student of Vanitha Veeravalli of the Bharata Academy of Dance Arts, a demonstration performance by Rangla Punjab folk dancers, and screening of a film about a child's life in India.

CHEC members Nafisa and Manna Bandukwala and IAC staff members Gita Chawla and Naitek Patel made “INDIA SHOWCASE” at the Shedd a day to remember.

Summer Fun

IAC's hugely successful Summer Fun program draws to a close, leaving mentors and program participants with wonderful memories of activities enjoyed and friendships forged. The eight-week program was offered free of charge to children between the ages of 6 and 14 on Saturday afternoons throughout the summer. Events included a fieldtrip to the Shedd Aquarium, Summer Olympics in Warren Park, art, theater, and yoga workshops, safety demonstrations by local fire and police departments, and marching in the Indian Independence parade, topped off with an End of the Summer party. Judging from the capacity attendance and the length of the waiting list, it is clear that a good time was had by all.



Annual Banquet

Sunday, October 16
Marriott Oak Brook
1401 West 22nd Street
Reception 5 p.m. Dinner 6:30 p.m.

Reservations:

Indo-American Center
Executive Director
773-973-4444 x 1
Tickets \$100 per person

Banquet Bonuses

Meet Author Suketu Mehta

Get your autographed copy of
Maximum City: Bombay Lost & Found

See Kathak Nrityakala Kendra performance

Preview Rasaka's critically acclaimed "The Masrayana"

Currently playing at the Prop Theatre
3502 North Elston, Chicago,
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