

ICAM'S NEWSLETTER

Winter 2025

Editor's Note

Samarpan's editorial team is pleased to share the Winter newsletter of 2025 with our readers. We are looking forward to publishing new contributions from our readers. Please submit your articles [here](#). Thank you!!

Newsletter Team

Anjali Arun | Subhankar Bhattacharya | Shatavisa Mukherjee | Anu Gupta | Sarika Gupta |
Ram Kadirvel | Nisha Kurup | Alka Mehra | Anu Nair | Salitha Philip | Priya Sampathkumar |
Ajay Singh | Namrata Tomer

In This Issue

President's Message

Since the Last Newsletter

- Annakut by Riddhi Patel
- Durga Puja by Depanjali Dasgupta
- Garba and Dandiya Night by Neha Joshi
- ICAM Diwali Event 2025 by Poojitha Rudra

Youth Scape

- A Journey Through Diwali: From Childhood Memories to Hosting the Celebration by Shambhavi Thakur

Recipe

- Gulabjamun Cheesecake by Pooja Reddy

President's Message

Dear Friends, Namaste!

As we embrace the holiday season, I extend my heartfelt wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I hope your Diwali celebrations were filled with joy and light, and that Thanksgiving brought warmth and togetherness with family and friends.

This year, ICAM's cultural events were truly memorable. For Garba, we proudly partnered with the Gujarati Samaj of Minnesota to welcome professional artists from India at the Chateau Theatre. The performances by Anushka Pandit, Bhargav Upadhyay, and their talented troupe created an unforgettable evening of music and dance that beautifully honored our traditions.

Our **Diwali 2025 Cultural Program** was another shining success. With over 500 attendees at the Byron High School Performing Arts Center, our community's diverse talents lit up the stage. The evening concluded with Fazel Haris and Gorinka's enchanting Bollywood

melodies—a perfect finale to a magical night. Special thanks to our dedicated emcees, gifted performers, generous sponsors, the Hindu Samaj Temple, and our enthusiastic volunteers whose tireless efforts made these events possible. I am also proud to share that we introduced multiple subcommittees this year to streamline planning and strengthen our organizational processes. The delicious food catered by Aroma from Minneapolis was enjoyed by many and added to the festive spirit.

As we close the year, ICAM will complete its election process. We extend our sincere gratitude to outgoing board members **Shital Aranake, Vijaykumar Kittuswamy, Pranav Kaila, and Sarika Gupta** for their invaluable service and commitment. Their volunteer contributions have been deeply appreciated and will always be remembered.

Thank you once again to our board members, volunteers, and the entire community for your continued support. I encourage you to visit our website, **icamn.org**, subscribe to our mailing list, and become an ICAM member. Membership is a small investment that helps sustain our organization, and we are pleased to share that new benefits have recently been added.

Warm regards,
Ajay Singh
President, ICAM Board



Since Last Newsletter

Annakut

Author: Riddhi Patel

'Ann' means **food** and 'kut' means **mountain**. Annakut, therefore, is the offering of a "mountain of food" to the murti, or sacred image, of God, a heartfelt expression of gratitude for the year gone by and a reverent beginning to the year ahead. This offering symbolizes abundance, humility, and the loving bond between devotees and the Divine.

The day after Diwali, **Kartak Sud 1**, marks the day of Annakut. Dressed in their finest attire, families go to the mandir early in the morning to join in the aarti, seeking blessings for peace, harmony, and spiritual growth. Thereafter, devotees prepare a variety of pure vegetarian delicacies with devotion. These dishes are then beautifully arranged into an Annakut, and offered before Bhagwan while singing thaal with deep emotion and reverence.

Across **BAPS mandirs around the world**, this spirit of devotion is beautifully expressed as children, youth, and elders join together to prepare the Annakut, which can vary in size. I feel joyful and blessed to celebrate this tradition since my childhood. Carrying this tradition forward, the **Rochester Hindu Temple**, in association with the **BAPS Mandir in Minneapolis**, has celebrated the New Year Annakut together for the last four years. Devotees lovingly prepare around **100 vegetarian offerings**, placing each dish before the deities in surrenderance and gratitude. The celebration includes devotional thaal, a grand arti, and the distribution of **prasad**, or sanctified food, allowing everyone to partake in God's blessings.

Honoring the sentiments of Diwali through community celebration year after year has kept followers of the faith connected to their roots, while providing well-wishers the opportunity to participate in new cultural experiences.



Durga Puja

Author : Debanjali Dasgupta

Durga Puja is a major Indian festival celebrating the victory of goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura, that symbolizes the triumph of good over evil. Besides this main theme of the puja, Bengalis consider it as Maa Durga's homecoming to her maternal home, which makes this puja not just a festival, but an emotion, as a connection to their roots. Durga Puja is a 10-day festival celebrated during Navratri time, with the final five days from Sasthi to Dasami being the most significant for Bengalis. According to the Hindu lunisolar calendar, Durga Puja takes place in the month of Aswin (September or October).

This year, in Rochester Minnesota, Durga Puja was organized by CABERI (Cultural Association of Bengalees in Rochester, MN) on September 27-28 2025, at Hindu Samaj Temple of Minnesota. Since people are busy with work and school here, the entire puja was celebrated over that weekend rather than the traditional five days. Yet, all efforts were made to bring the charm of Bengal's puja days. The worship of Maa Durga was accompanied by the chanting of mantras by the priest, Pushpanjali, bhog nibedan, the puja decorations, beats of dhak and kasar, all these things recreated the atmosphere of the Bengal puja.

One amazing aspect of celebrating Durga Puja here is that it brings together Bengalis from different parts of the country. This year a lot of people travelled long distances to attend this puja event with us. It is a time to meet old friends as well as make new ones, wearing Bengalis' very traditional red-white sarees, witnessing the beautiful cultural programs, and last but not the least, enjoying homecooked Bengali traditional food, lovingly prepared by the CABERI volunteers. Everyone who participated in the celebration enjoyed the very special Khichuri Bhog after the Puja along with other delicious Bengali cuisine for Lunch and dinner.

Celebrating Durga Puja away from home is a magical way of bringing a piece of home back into our day-to-day lives. Even though we are far from Bengal, the sound of the dhak, the fragrance of incense, the taste of khichuri bhog, and the warmth of all the friends recreate the emotions through which we all grew up.



Garba and Dandiya Night

Author: Neha Joshi

A Night of Rhythm, Color, Devotion, and Community at the Chateau Theatre, Rochester

The **Garba and Dandiya Night** on October 5th, 2025, was an unforgettable celebration of music, devotion, and cultural unity, beautifully brought to life by the **Indian Cultural Association of Minnesota (ICAM)**. Held at the historic **Chateau Theatre in Rochester**, the event filled the evening with vibrant colors, energetic rhythms, and a shared sense of joy that made the entire community feel like one big family.

From the moment the doors opened at 4 PM, the warmth and hospitality of the organizers were evident. **Registration was smooth, welcoming, and inclusive**, with separate sign-ups for kids and adults. In true ICAM spirit, dandiya sticks were made available for everyone, ensuring that no one felt left out, whether it was their first Garba or a tradition they grew up with. That simple gesture reflected ICAM's core values—openness, togetherness, and celebration without boundaries.

The ambience inside the hall was nothing short of magical. The theatre was **beautifully lit**, spacious, and perfectly suited for the energetic dances that define Garba and Dandiya. The **audio team** did a phenomenal job managing the sound system, keeping the beats alive and ensuring the energy never dipped, not even for a moment.

One of the highlights of the evening was the electrifying music. The event featured **versatile singer Anushka Pandit** and **renowned Gujarati playback singer Bhargav Upadhyay**, whose powerful vocals and dynamic performances elevated the entire experience. Their music carried the essence of tradition while keeping everyone energized and joyful.

Throughout the event, attendees were treated to a delicious spread of Indian flavors. **Special chaats—famous across India—were available throughout the evening**, adding a nostalgic and comforting touch to the celebration. With people dressed in their **traditional Garba attire**, the hall transformed into a swirl of colors, patterns, and happy faces.

A unique attraction this year was the **free 360-degree photo booth**, where families and friends captured stunning festive moments together. It became a crowd favorite, giving everyone a chance to remember their traditional look in a fun and memorable way.

A spiritually enriching moment came when the entire audience gathered for **Aarti**, offering prayers together as one unified community. Each person present had a chance to participate, creating a heartfelt moment of devotion and connection. It was a beautiful reminder that events like these are not just about dance—they are about culture, spirituality, and the bonds we share.

As a participant, experiencing this sense of belonging was truly special. **ICAM continues to uphold a tradition of making every individual feel welcomed and valued**, no matter which part of India they come from. The feeling of “we are all family” could be sensed everywhere—from the volunteers’ kindness to the enthusiasm of the crowd.

A heartfelt **thank-you** goes out to the **AV team**, who ensured seamless music throughout the night, the **venue management team**, and every single **ICAM member and volunteer** who contributed their time and passion to create such a well organized event. Their dedication behind the scenes made the evening smooth, energetic, and deeply meaningful.

The **Garba and Dandiya Night of 2025** will be remembered not just for its lively dances or delicious food, but for the spirit of unity, joy, and cultural pride that filled the Chateau Theatre. It was a celebration where traditions came alive, friendships grew stronger, and every heart danced to the rhythm of togetherness.





ICAM Diwali Event 2025

Author: Poojitha Rudra

The ICAM Diwali event on November 8th, 2025, was truly a bright and joyful celebration for the entire Rochester community. This year's gathering felt extra special not just because of the incredible performances, but because of the care and thoughtful planning that went into it long before Diwali arrived.

Right from the start, the registration process was smooth and welcoming. Even after the official sign-up period ended, the ICAM team kindly made room for additional participants who still wanted to join. It was a small gesture that said a lot about their commitment to inclusivity and community spirit. No one was left out, and that sense of openness set the tone for the whole celebration.

After registering, participants were asked to submit a short two-minute video of their performance. The ICAM cultural team reviewed each submission with attention and care, sharing helpful suggestions to make every performance shine. Their feedback was not just technical, it was encouraging, motivating, and thoughtful. Once groups sent in their full-length videos, organizers used them to plan the performance order in a way that felt balanced and natural.

One of the most impressive parts of the entire event was how beautifully the program flowed. With so many dance groups, costume changes, and performers of all ages, the ICAM team managed the schedule with true finesse. Every transition felt smooth and effortless. You could tell the organizers had anticipated every little detail, which made the experience stress-free for performers and enjoyable for the audience.

The day before the event, on November 7th, all performers gathered for stage practice. There were audio checks, lighting adjustments, spacing run-throughs, and last-minute refinements. The volunteers and technical crew worked tirelessly behind the scenes, to ensure that every group had the time and space they needed. Their patience and support created a calm, confident environment for everyone involved.

This year, I also had the wonderful opportunity to be a choreographer for the ICAM kids' dance group for children under 5 years old. It was such a heartwarming experience. I met so many parents and their adorable little ones, and the energy those kids brought to every single practice was just amazing. Their excitement, innocence, and enthusiasm added a special spark to the preparation journey. Watching them learn, laugh, and give their best made the whole experience even more meaningful for me.

On the big day, the program started right on time. The auditorium came alive with nearly 40 spectacular performances, each one vibrant and full of life. Kids danced with pure joy, adults performed with passion, and together they created an inspiring showcase of culture and talent. The energy in the room was incredible, there were moments of laughter, cheering, and even heartfelt silence during some of the more emotional pieces. It was a true celebration of tradition, art, and community pride.

After the performances, everyone headed to a separate hall for a delicious Indian dinner. The comforting spread was filled with familiar flavors and favorite dishes, and it brought people together in the warmest way. Families and friends gathered at tables, and new connections were made over shared food. The night continued with live music, which added even more vibrance and joy to the evening.

What made this year's Diwali especially memorable was the sense of unity that filled the venue. Parents, children, volunteers, and performers all came together like one big extended family. You could feel the collective effort, the dedication, and the love that went into every part of the event.

The ICAM team truly outdid themselves. Their hard work, warmth, and dedication made the entire celebration feel seamless and heartfelt. For many of us including me it was such a joy to perform in multiple dances without any stress, and to soak in the amazing talent that lives right here in Rochester, Minnesota.

A big, heartfelt thank-you to the entire ICAM team, the volunteers, and everyone who contributed to making Diwali 2025 beautifully organized, meaningful, and unforgettable!



Relive the ICAM Diwali Cultural Event

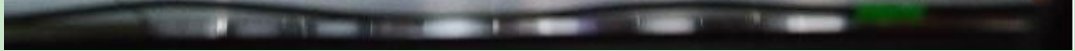
If you would like a copy of your individual performance video, please have your program coordinator contact us at contact@icamn.org.





















Youth Scape

A Journey Through Diwali: From Childhood Memories to Hosting the Celebration

Author: Shambhavi Thakur

My first memory of the Rochester Diwali Celebration is from when I was just four years old. I participated in the veggie dance with my mom and many of my peers. I remember watching the older girls sing and dance together, amazed by their graceful steps and the loud, vibrant music. I attended the celebration every year until we moved to Wisconsin. During my five years away from Rochester, I deeply missed the community and culture that the event brought into my life.

When we moved back, I was excited to attend the celebrations again and share them with my little sister, Saanvi. She was amazed by everything and even created her own group to dance with. I was awestruck watching her perform—her energy, along with that of her friends, was contagious. Each time I saw her on stage, I was filled with pride and joy.

My favorite part, aside from the performances, was always watching the emcees, who were seniors at various Olmsted County high schools. Since I was little, I admired the older girls in their beautiful, elaborate lehengas as they announced on stage. This year, I was honored with the opportunity to host the function at my very own high school in Byron, MN. It was incredible to contribute behind the scenes as well, working with lighting and sound and applying my background knowledge as a Production Stage Manager at Byron High School Theatre. I loved getting to know the other emcees and becoming good friends with them.

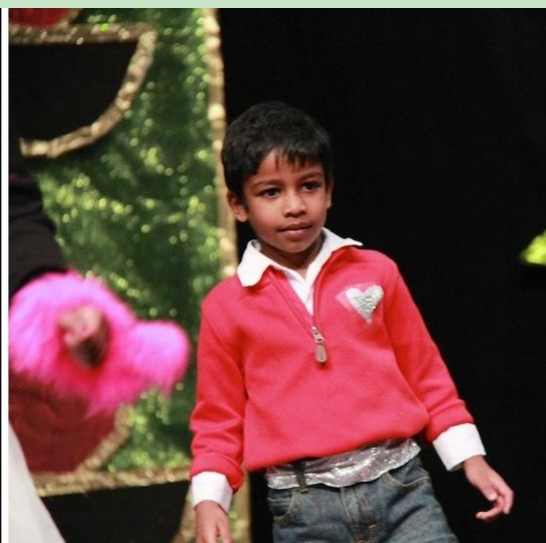
The highlight for me was announcing Saanvi's dance performance and standing in the wings as I watched her shine on stage. The Diwali function has always given me a deep sense of community and culture, and I am truly grateful to have been a part of it.



Emcees at this year's Diwali event (from left to right): Sarika Pandey, Shambhavi Thakur, Tej Bhagra, Srinidhi Babu, Anisa Ramar, Gautham Anand, Ria Shah, Mahadev Krishnan, Krishna Kadirvel, and Prasaad Ayyanar.



Then and now. Shambhavi Thakur's childhood Veggie Dance at Diwali (left) and a present-day moment with her sister, Saanvi, at this year's celebration (right).



Childhood Diwali moments of Mahadev (left) and Krishna (right), showing that the festive spirit has been part of their journey from the very beginning.

Recipe

Gulabjamun Cheesecake

Author : Pooja Reddy

Some of my fondest childhood memories center around the lively parties and gatherings at our home. Whether we were hosting ten people or a hundred, my amazing mother somehow always managed to conjure up an impressive spread—mouthwatering appetizers, scrumptious main courses, and of course, irresistible desserts. While her signature sweet was almost always something mango-inspired, I wanted to share a dessert that truly captures the essence of my own upbringing: growing up in New York—arguably the cheesecake capital of the world—while staying connected to my Indian heritage. The result? A gulab jamun cheesecake.

Gulab jamun, often described as “Indian donuts”, is a beloved dessert made from fried milk-based dough balls soaked in a fragrant rosewater and cardamom syrup. If you're lucky, as I am, you might have access to freshly made gulab jamun from a family member's kitchen (thanks to my father-in-law!) — but store-bought ones work perfectly well too. I love how

pistachios complement the sweetness of the gulab jamun and the creaminess of the cheesecake, though this recipe can easily be adapted to be entirely nut-free. If you do choose to add pistachios, take it from me: shell them before you start baking and hide them immediately—otherwise my nut-loving husband and children (or yours!) will snack away your garnish before it ever reaches the cheesecake. I hope you enjoy this culinary fusion as much as I've enjoyed sharing it with friends and family. Happy baking!

Crust

- 11 graham cracker sheets
- 1/4 cup shelled pistachios, unsalted (can omit and add one more graham cracker sheet for nut free option)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 7 tablespoons of butter, melted

For the cheesecake filling

- approximately 10-15 medium sized gulab jamun
- 2 8 oz packages of full fat cream cheese (room temperature)
- 1/2 sour cream (I prefer using full fat Greek yogurt instead)
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons milk
- Pinch of salt

Optional, but highly recommended

- 1/4 tsp of freshly ground cardamom
- 7-8 strands of saffron soaked in 1 tablespoon of warm milk

Optional decorations: I like to keep my decorations simple with crushed pistachio and rose petals, but feel free to add halved gulab jamuns and whipped cream! Do what makes you happy!

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F
2. Place the graham crackers and pistachios in a food processor and pulverize until it is finely ground. In a bowl, mix together the graham cracker and pistachio crumbs with the melted butter and sugar. The end result should look like wet sand.
3. Press the mixture into a greased 8 inch springform pan. Make sure it is even and smooth.
4. Bake in the oven for 8-10 minutes. Remove from the oven and let it cool before adding the gulab jamun and cheesecake filling.
5. Create a cornstarch slurry by mixing the cornstarch with the 2 tablespoons of milk
6. Use a stand mixer or hand mixer and beat the cream cheese until soft and fluffy.
7. Add the sugar, cornstarch mixture, sour cream, and pinch of salt to the cream cheese. If using, add the saffron milk and cardamom as well. Mix until smooth and well combined.
8. Place gulab jamuns onto the cooled crust. Pour the cheesecake batter over the gulab jamun.
9. Bake the cheesecake for 40-50 minutes. You will know it's done when the cheesecake is set on the sides but jiggles a little in the middle. At this point, prop the oven door open for 1-2 hours so that the cheesecake cools slowly. This prevents cracking.
10. Place the cheesecake on the counter for 2-3 hours until it reaches room temperature. Transfer to the fridge for let set for at least 4 hours or overnight.
11. After it's set, run a knife around the edge of the cheesecake before releasing from the springform pan.

Decorate, slice, and enjoy!



Have you considered becoming an ICAM member?
Check out <http://icamn.org/membership> to learn about the amazing benefits you can enjoy!



ICAM | 911 11th Avenue NW | Rochester, MN 55901 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!