

Diwali Indian Festival

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Every fall, Miami University's Indian Student Association hosts an evening of Indian fashion, dance, song, and cuisine. Under the umbrella of the Indian holiday Diwali, the ISA showcases their heritage in an evening of education and entertainment about Indian culture. Junior psychology major Niha Reddy describes Diwali as the "Indian Christmas."

"Diwali is the Festival of Lights," Reddy explained. "It's our biggest holiday and as such we use it as a time to share our culture with the rest of Miami." One way the ISA shares their culture is through the Diwali fashion show, night's first event.

During the fashion show, ISA members show off traditional Indian clothing from the women's saris to the men's kurtas. "We like to wear our formal clothing during the fashion show," said Reddy. The formal clothing—made with high-end fabrics like silk and decorated with elaborate beading—is usually worn for special occasions or holidays, but the Indian students do not get the opportunity to wear their formal garb during the school year.

According to Shereene Tailor, senior marketing major and Diwali co-chair (along with Reddy), the fashion show is a great display of the students' cultural heritage. "Everyone has a little bit of a different style depending on their heritage and what region they're from," says Tailor. "It's a great way for the audience to see all the different types of clothing in India."

The fashion show is just a kick-start to Diwali, warming up the stage for the night's main event: song and dance. Both classical and modern dances are featured throughout the evening's six routines. "We like to have a fusion of modern and traditional," Tailor said. She went on to say that this year's event will have a heavy emphasis on the traditional. "We're trying to get back to the roots of Diwali and of our culture—that's what this show is about."

To the ISA, this show is about showcasing their culture and heritage using Diwali as a platform. "The reason for this Diwali celebration is not only for us to partake in our culture, but for us to share it with the rest of campus," said Reddy. The dances of the Diwali celebration play an important role in sharing Indian culture, with the ISA performing traditional dances like Raas and Bhangra.

Raas is an interactive dance performed during the Autumn holiday of Navaratri. Hailing from the state of Gujarat, participants gather in front of the temple and form large circles, interacting with their partners through the use of wooden sticks called dandiyas. "Some circles can have up to 200 people," Reddy said. "You can't just watch Raas: You have to be a part of it."

Like Raas, Bhangra has ceremonial origins, and is still a large part of harvest festival celebrations. This upbeat dance is from the Punjab region and, according to Tailor, is a crowd favorite. "It's fast, it's fun, it gets people's blood pumping. It's our big blow-out dance at the end of the show: Everyone loves it."

The ISA also puts on a freshmen and senior dance specific to students in those classes. The freshmen dance serves as an icebreaker for new ISA members. "When you are just starting out at college and you're away from your family for the first time, it is hard to keep your roots alive," Reddy said. "The freshmen dance is a way for the first years to meet people their own age that

The senior dance is just the opposite of the freshmen dance, serving as a last hurrah instead of a maiden voyage. “It’s kind of a rite of passage,” Reddy said of the senior dance. “It is a way for the seniors to show how we have cultivated our dance skills over the past four years.” The senior dance is a nice contrast to the freshmen dance, showing both ends of the spectrum.

According to Reddy, “It’s interesting to see the freshmen and what kind of skills they have, and then see the seniors and how they’ve grown.”

Following the dancing is the Diwali celebration dinner, featuring a buffet of traditional Indian cuisine. “People really love the dinner,” Tailor said. “Either people are simply curious about Indian food, or they have had Indian food and can’t get enough.” Last year was the first year the ISA collaborated with Shriver to cater the Diwali dinner, and Tailor said they will be doing the same this year. “Working with Shriver is great. They’re open to all of our ideas, have us in for taste-testing, and really work together with us to make a fabulous Indian dinner.”

From the fashion show to the dancing to the dinner, the ISA’s Diwali celebration is an evening not just of entertainment, but of education about India and Indian heritage.



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