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Metro

Locals celebrate India’s independence, memorialize Sikh temple shooting

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT AUGUST 13, 2012

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PHOTOS BY TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Dancers from Boston Bhangra prepared to perform at the Hatch Memorial Shell Sunday in celebration of the 65th anniversary of India's independence. There are between 80,000 and 100,000 Indian-Americans in the Boston area.

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Thousands gathered at the Hatch Memorial Shell in Boston Sunday to celebrate the 65th anniversary of India's independence from British rule.

The annual event included upbeat festivities, but also somber reflection and prayer for the victims of a deadly shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wis., one week before.

"The tragedy shocked our nation and our community and our thoughts and prayers are with those impacted," Amrit Soni, president of the India Association of Greater Boston.

The association has hosted the event at the Charles River Esplanade the past 25 years to show cultural pride and commemorate the date, Aug. 15, 1947, when India became an independent nation.

Soni said there are between 80,000 and 100,000 Indian-Americans in the Boston area.

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“This community has been doing very well,” he said. “We have brought the values from our country here.”

The daylong festivities featured a mix of classical, fusion, and Bollywood music and dance performances and a sampling of cuisine unique to various regions across the world’s second-most populous country. Most on stage and many in the crowd wore vividly designed garments and jewelry.

Zehra Khan, a director of the association’s executive committee, said the event displays India's colorful diversity.

Mila Ghosh and her husband, Debashis, both 51, of Ashland, have attended the celebration for several years, after moving from their native Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India, more than 20 years ago. Aside from celebrating their cultural roots, they came to watch their daughter, Ranita, 18, dance on stage. “We’re very proud,” Mila Ghosh said. “Being a part of this is special.”

The couple also hoped Sunday’s gathering would help ease the pain for local followers of Sikhism after the Wisconsin rampage. “I hope members of the Sikh community will come on stage and can unite here,” said Debashis Ghosh.

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