



The audience at the event.

10,000 people attend Houston Dussehra event



Staging the Ram Leela.

SUMAN MOZUMDER

With 10,000 people in attendance, the largest Dussehra and Diwali event in the Houston area was celebrated at Skeeter's Stadium October 4.

The event was organized by the Shri Sita Ram Foundation.

The special attractions at the event were the *Ram Leela* performed by local actors on a three-tiered stage built for the occasion, and a multi-float parade.

Many local organizations and temples took part in the hour-long parade, which included floats depicting Indian mythological characters and scriptures.

Two Lord Ram temples were set up, including one in the breezeways of the stadium.

Prasadam brought from Ayodhya, India, was distributed along with sweets ordered from the ISKCON temple.

"We are very pleased with our community's massive support for this sold-out event," Dr Arun Verma, president, Shri Sita Ram Foundation, told *India Abroad*.

"So many people, including seniors, came not just from Houston but also from outside the area to be at this spectacular event. Many present felt it was comparable only with the ones held in India on such a grand scale. But without the hard work of many volunteers, this program would not have been possible."



Shree Jalaram Mandir's expansion begins

A shilanyas ceremony was organized at the Shree Jalaram Mandir, Hoffman Estates, Illinois, October 4. The ceremony marked the beginning of the expansion and renovation work of the temple and installation of deities.



Maya Sarihan

Maya Sarihan wins 'Miss India America' title

GEORGE JOSEPH

Physiology student Maya Charuni Sarihan from Scottsdale, Arizona, was crowned the 22nd Miss India America 2014 in Los Angeles.

Meghana Pagadala, a student at CalTech University in California was the first runner up followed by actress Vivica Mitra from Southern California.

Chinese-born American actress Bai Lin, Bollywood filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, NBA Sacramento Kings owner Vivek Ranadive and NFL soccer player Bret Lockett attended the event led by Jinder Chauhan of Spirit of India.

The contest started off with the traditional Indian wear round, followed by a talent round. The final round was the Western formal wear one.

Sarihan, 20, sang *Paani Da Rang* (*Vicky Donor*).

The winning question was asked by celebrity make-up artist Tamanna Roshan.

"If you could choose to have good grammar or good taste, which would it be and why?" she asked.

Sarihan responded, "You can have all the beautiful clothes and jewelry in the world, but a woman who can't speak for herself, can never be considered beautiful."

Sarihan said it was her first pageant experience. "Two months prior to the competition I walked the ramp for a local Indian fashion show and I guess that's where the modeling bug caught me," she told *India Abroad*.

"The experience was stressful and magical as well. Stressful, because I didn't want to let anyone down; my parents came all the way from Phoenix to support me, my sponsors invested hundreds of dollars on me, and here I was a complete novice. But when I got on stage that night, I realized it was now or never, and I had to give my very best," she added.

Sarihan's doctor parents, Vijay and Veena Sarihan, hail from Jalandhar, Punjab, and initially were not supportive of her decision to contest.

"Academics are the most important thing in my household so this came to my parents as a shock," Sarihan said. "But the pride I saw in their eyes the night I won made up for the constant struggle I went through over those summer months convincing them."