

# Shiv Mandir Of Atlanta Celebrates Bhoomi Poojan

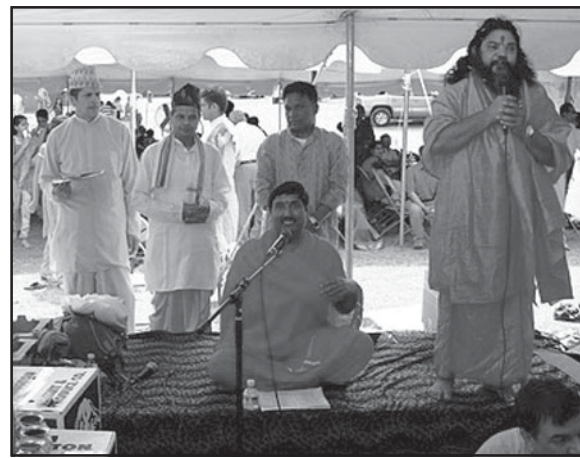
Atlanta, GA: On the very auspicious day of Akashya Tritiya (Sunday, May 16th, 2010), Shiv Mandir of Atlanta celebrated the Bhoomi Poojan for building a new Shiv Mandir at 890 Peachtree Industrial Blvd., Sugar Hill, GA 30518. The ceremony saw an overwhelming participation of the Greater Atlanta Hindu community and that far exceeded the expectations of Shiv Mandir board and executive committee.

The event started at 4.00 A.M., at the present mandir location in Global Mall, with a group of 20 committed devotee walkers that took the "Main Klash" on a 17 mile journey through the city of Norcross, Buford, and Suwanee to its final destination at the new mandir site. On the way, more devotees joined this pilgrimage and over 300 devotees participated for the final 1.5 miles of Rath Yatra (Shobha Yatra). The atmosphere was filled with the chanting of Om Namah Shivaya and the beat of the Dhol.

Swami Dr Ram Kamal Das ji Vedanti received the Kalash at the land and performed Dhwaya Rohan to mark the start of the bhoomi poojan. Swamiji outlined the importance of temples in our culture and religion and congratulated the Atlanta Hindu community on participating in this historic

opportunity.

Main ceremony started with introduction of Swami Ram Kamal Das Vedantiji – Spiritual Guide



for the ceremony by Mr. Surinder Dhar, President of the executive committee. A team of seven priests was led by Shiv Mandir's priest Pdt Gyan Prakash Upadhyay for various poojas that reminder devotees of the great Hindu traditions. The Mantra

recited by seven priests in unison created a divine vibration at the land and enthralled all devotees

Lunch and Dinner were served between 12:00 – 12:30 and 5:00- 6:00pm and fruits, snacks, tea and cold water were served all day to devotees.

More than 1500 people participated in the bhoomi poojan event, with around 300 devotees participated in all poojas that lasted for 6 hours. Besides participation of the large number of well know community leaders, the City of SugarHill Mayor - Mr. Gary Pirkle, Council member – Mr. Mike Sullivan and Land planning director – Mr. Kaipo Awana attended the ceremony. Mr. Pirkle congratulated Shiv Mandir management and welcomed Shiv Mandir to the city of SugarHill.

Board Chairman Mr. Ajeet Das concluded the event with vote of thanks and praised the community for making

the most important and memorable event in mandir's history a grand success. Also he urged the community to join hands to attain the next goal of ground breaking ceremony of the Shiv Mandir in next 12 months.

Shiv Mandir of Atlanta is a place of worship for all devotees of Sanatan Hindu Dharm and it preserves and embellishes Hindu traditions and cultural heritage by conducting and sponsoring religious, spiritual, charitable, educational, social and cultural activities for the benefit of the young, adults, women and senior citizens of Hindu community. In 2005 Shiv Mandir of Atlanta acquired 11.4 acres of land which is located at 890 Peachtree Industrial Blvd., Sugar Hill, GA 30518.

The Mandir will have Lord Shiv (Shiv Parivar) as the main deity, along with Ram Parivar, Radha ji & Krishna ji, Bala ji and Durga Mata ji independently located on the same floor with pooja/parikarma areas for individual worship. The Mandir's architecture will follow Hindu design and concepts with special effects to create grandness. There will be a grand Main Entrance and a Dhway Stambh, a community kitchen, office, class rooms, and Auditorium. The main pooja floor will have 300-500 sitting capacity to accommodate a large gathering for special pooja/celebrations and large enough to accommodate multiple smaller gatherings while maintaining mandir's tranquility. The Mandir will also have a library and an outdoor Yagna Shala pavilion. The present estimated Phase I construction cost is approximately three and a half million dollars.

## National Bhutanese Empowerment Conference Held

Atlanta, GA: The first Bhutanese Refugee empowerment conference was held at the Hindu Heritage Center, Global Mall in Atlanta, Georgia on April 17th-18th, 2010. Thirty-two Bhutanese delegates from across the United States and an equal number of Sewa International USA coordinators participated in the conference. The conference, organized by SEWA USA, was intended to provide a platform to nurture national and local

Bhutanese, addressed the gathering and shared their perspective on the challenges faced by refugee Bhutanese. Also, Shiv Agarwal, owner of Global Mall, and Dr. Ravi Sarma, ex president of Hindu Temple of Atlanta, talked about their experience of living in America. Dr. Sarma lauded the deep connection that the Bhutanese community had for their Vedic roots.

GV Raghu of Chinmay Mission, Surinder Dhar of Shiv Mandir, Dr. Indira Menon (who had conducted several eye camps for the Bhutanese), Dr. Sreeni Gangasani, President Elect of Georgia's association of Physicians of Indian heritage (GAPI) were some of the prominent dignitaries from the Indian community.

Prof. Sreenath, President, SEWAUSA, gave a roundup of the Bhutanese conflict and summary of resettlement efforts. Santi Ram Poudel, a prominent Bhutanese community leader from Cleveland, shared his experiences. This was followed by a women's self-help group presentation by Mrs. Rastogi from Cleveland. Dr. Lopita Nath, an accomplished academician, enlightened the delegates about the economic, cultural, and political history of the Lhotshampas. Surya Jiludimudi, a key conference organizer, and Swadesh Katoch presented healthcare projects in Atlanta.

Amol Vichare, a civil engineer and SEWAUSA volunteer, made a very innovative and interesting presentation on low cost housing. The Bhutanese delegates showed a lot of interest in affordable housing options through Habitat for Humanity. Another volunteer, Gaurav Verma, highlighted the benefits of leveraging environment friendly resources in America like recycles.org and freecycles.org to procure computers for school children.

The presentations were followed by workshop sessions. Here the delegates were di-

vided into regional groups and asked to state the three top resettlement problems in their zone. The following issues were determined and recognized as most important: Youth Development, Cultural Preservation/Adaptation, Employment / Income Generation, Women's Issues, Housing – permanent living, Education, Health Insurance, and Safety. The delegates then discussed potential solutions to these issues. Ralph Parker, an American resettlement volunteer, stressed the need for generating more emergency funds to deal with growing resettlement challenges. Ganesh Ghimere, a Bhutanese expatriate and lawyer, provided Nepali translations for all announcements.

After a busy day, fun-filled cultural programs in the evening – kids' performances, veena recital, ethnic Bhutanese dances, and Bhajans - reignited a cultural nostalgia.

At the end of the first day of the conference, SewaUSA volunteers had an internal strategy and intellectual session conducted by Professor Sreenath (President, SewaUSA) of CASE western University, Cleveland.

The second day of the conference started with a Yoga and Pranayam session conducted by Swami Narayanji. Prof. Sree Sreenath gave an exclusive presentation on "Project Krishi", various experimental agricultural and marketing initiatives, and lessons learned in Cleveland, OH. Naveen, a young volunteer and agricultural engineer from Auburn University, GA, pledged his support to the Bhutanese to connect with academicians, and provide consultancy to interested Bhutanese farmers in the Southeast.

Prof. Dwivedi, an emeritus Professor from Howard University, Washington DC, shared his experience about America being a land of opportunities and the latent potential of Project Krishi to transform the refugees' quality of life; he encour-

aged the Bhutanese by saying, "You need to have your American dream and work towards it".

The Regional Director of Toastmasters Club, encouraged young delegates to nurture their public speaking skills and explore scholarship opportunities through the Toastmasters club in America. Five Bhutanese high school students also participated in the conference.



Khem Adhikari, from Texas, while speaking about his experience of attending the conference stressed the need of the Bhutanese community to preserve their Hindu roots in America by deriving inspiration from the Vedic Shastras.

Professor Sreenath concluded the conference with a spirited valedictory speech thanking all the delegates and SewaUSA volunteers. The positive aura of the attendees was inspiring. Beyond doubt, the conference generated a lot of much-needed conversations amongst Bhutanese community leaders to collaborate and learn from each other.

The conference was supported by VHPA, TAMA, Chinmay Mission, Shiv Mandir, Global Mall, Art of Living, GAPI, Toastmasters, and Hindu Temple of Atlanta. Many of the delegates attended the conference due to the personal inspiration and networking efforts of Pradeep Limaye, a retired control systems engineer from India, who donated four months of his time to organize this conference.



leadership among the Bhutanese through mentoring, and sharing successes and challenges.

After a warm welcome speech by Arun Kankani, President, Starpipe Products, Houston, Texas, the conference was inaugurated in a symbolic and traditional way with Deep Prajwalan (lighting of the lamp) by Anju Bhargava, Member of White House Commission for Interfaith and Neighborhood Partnerships. Pandit Madhav (a Bhutanese refugee himself) of Shiv Mandir in Global Mall recited Vedic Shanti Mantras in the backdrop.

Anju Bhargava, Prof. Dwivedi, and Narayan Swami, a prominent spiritual figure amongst the