

Community Scene

A DIZZYING swirl of vibrant, unashamedly bold saris, salwars and gold-trimmed sherwanis decorated the Grand ballroom at Crowne Plaza in Norwest as over 100 guests and dignitaries of Indian and non-Indian backgrounds celebrated the inaugural charity event 'Christmas in July' on July 25.

The evening, which aimed to celebrate Indian culture through a mosaic of music, dance and culinary marvels, was hosted by Guneeta Dhingra and presented by Roots, an online organisation promoting Indian culture.

Guneeta had been planning the event since February this year and intended to "show the best of India to the Australian community" particularly as the 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games looms ahead.

"I wanted to have an event to show what the true passion, life, culture, religious festivals are all about in India," she said.

She added that the 'Christmas in July' theme was an ideal way of getting Australians involved – by giving them the opportunity to celebrate Christmas in July, but with a Bollywood-inspired twist.

Fully catered by Crowne Plaza, the entrée featured vegetarian *samosas*, with a *daal*-like soup and assorted chutney dips. Butter chicken, lamb korma and *naan* were some of the appetising highlights of the main course, with whipped cream and *kulfi* as the dessert.

Recently appointed chairman of the NSW cricket board, Dr GK Harinath and his wife were amongst the special guests on the night.

"We must take every opportunity to develop relations between Australia and India," Dr Harinath said.

"The Indian community has a lot of

diverse talent to offer," he added, noting that he was thrilled to see this integration between the Australian and Indian communities on the night.

Tourism was promoted through a visual presentation, which offered a crash course in India's vast culture from east, west, north and south India. Guests were also given *Incredible India* gift packs, featuring a DVD and promotional brochures.

But the night, of course, was more than just about marketing Indian tourism: it also raised money for children's charity Barnados by auctioning off donated hand-crafted Indian artefacts. From intricate handmade purses and handbags to precious-stone jewellery and symbolic religious paintings, guests bid on the items. A total of \$2685 was raised on the night.

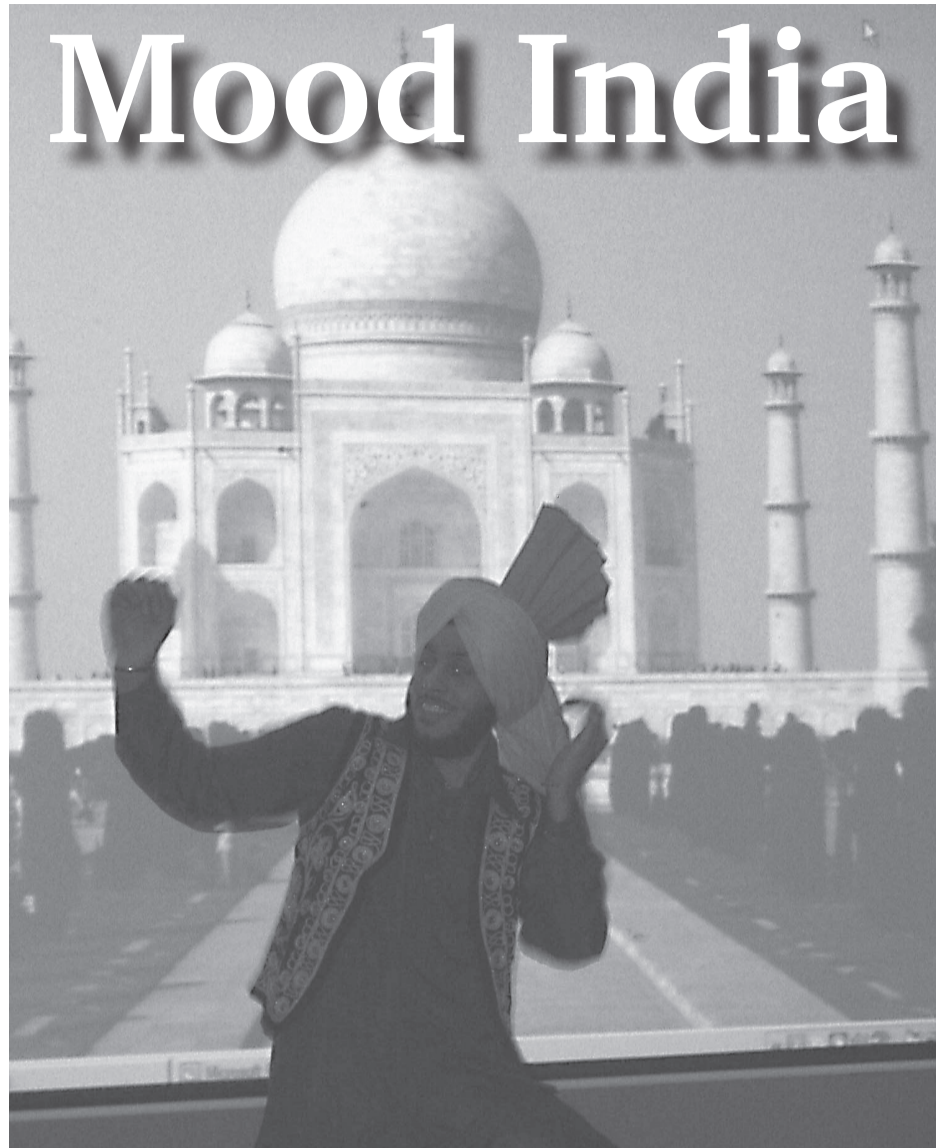
In good spirit, Dr Harinath purchased the first item on auction – a handmade, carved wooden box. He also donated four tickets to the South Africa-Australia test, which were sold for \$650.

But the biggest item was a lavish Chef's table for 15 people at Nilgiri's restaurant, which went for a cool \$1000.

The prizes were equally as juicy – Ms Dhingra concealed a well-kept secret surprise until the very end, when one lucky guest won a return airfare ticket to India, courtesy of sponsors Royal Travels.

School friends Tanaya Patel and Chloe Nindra accompanied their mothers on a 'girls' night out'. "It's good to see that other cultures are interested in India," said Tanaya, adding that her mother bid on a trinket at the charity auction.

As dancing is a huge part of our culture, this event was not lacking for it. Folk, classical and Bollywood dances entertained the audience throughout the night,



beginning with a traditional, welcoming dance, *Swaagatam* by Poornima Sharma.

Other dances ensued with a Kuchipudi dance and traditional Punjabi bhangra performed by the Indian Dance Centre and a Bollywood number later in the evening. Once the night finished, guests were invited to join the dance floor and show off their bhangra skills.

And it turned out that many guests had personal links to India, which ran deeper than a love for Bollywood.

For Carmel Zorzit, whose husband is embarking on a six-week trip to Delhi, India



Poornima Sharma

has always been her passion. Sporting a striking sari which Guneeta Dhingra lent to her, she said: "Indians are deeply beautiful people and there's a lot to say for their beliefs and their culture."

A self-confessed lover of Indian cuisine, she said that she learnt to make *chapatti*, *daal* and a potato and beef curry from a work colleague who lived in India.

Sri Lankan Tiddy Wijeratne, who

By
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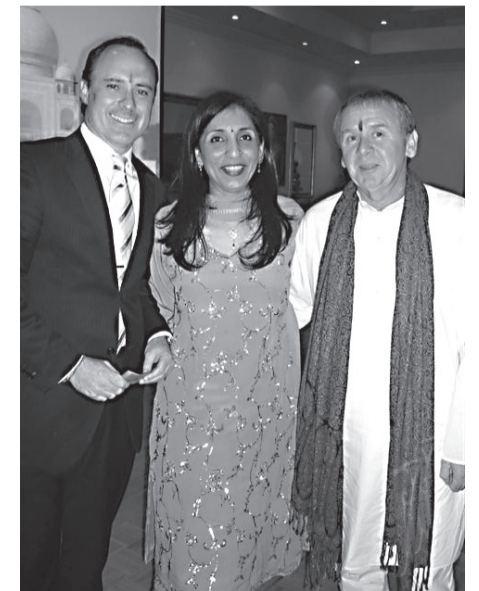


travelled from Canberra for the event, said it was a learning experience. "We were educated on the history and culture of different

regions of India," he added. "The dinner, consisting of ethnic Indian cuisine was a journey of discovery for the numerous non-Indians."

The night also commemorated India's growing list of high achievers, with another visual presentation (first put together by *Indian Link* in July 2007) honouring Indians who have impacted upon the world – from Gandhiji to billionaire Mukesh Ambani.

For Brian McHenry, Crowne Plaza



Guneeta Dhingra with guests

Norwest's general manager, the night was more than just about Australian-Indian cultural integration. "The Indian community has already cemented relationships – this is just icing on the cake," he said.

He added that the event could become a yearly fixture in the hotel's agenda: "We could run it every day for a whole week in July and call it 'India week!'"

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