

## A Unique Vijaya Dashmi Celebration at Vadodara, India

October 28, 2023

October 24, 2023: **Vijaya Dashami or Dussehra** is a Hindu festival celebrated on the **tenth day** of the Vikrami Samvat's (or calendar's) month of Ashwin. (Ashwin is the 7<sup>th</sup> month in the Vikrami Samvat.) Vijaya Dashami marks the end of the Sharad **Navratri** (or the festival of nine nights) of prayer with music and 'Garba' dance.

In northern India, **Vijaya Dashami** is celebrated in honour of Lord Rama and to re-emphasize every year that the **victory of good over evil is the cosmic law**. In many places, the **Ramlila**, a dramatic performance, on the story of Lord Rama, is enacted over the 9 days leading up to **Vijayadashami**. On this tenth day, a public program of **Ravan Dahan** is organized at some open place in the area. The program of **Ravan Dahan** consists of burning the **effigies of Ravana** and his brother **Kumbhkarna** and his son **Meghnath**, as a symbol of **burning evil in one's heart** through introspection. The performance of **Ram Lila** on the first nine days of the month of Ashwin as well as the **Ravan Dahan** program are inspired by "**Ramcharitmanas**", a book on the history of Lord Rama by Saint **Tulsidas**.



*Ravan Dahan on Vijaya Dashmi day*

The Indian subcontinent has a common culture and way of thinking. However, its expression in celebrations of festivals varies in different parts of India. Thus, in Gujarat, traditionally the festival of '**Navratris**' is celebrated through Garba dance on nine nights. On the tenth day, i.e. the day after the ninth night, there is no festivity.

In the city of **Vadodara in Gujarat**, a good number of North Indians had come for work, business and studies. Some of them decided to add flavour of the way of celebration of the festivals of the North to the rich culture of Vadodara. So, they formed **Northern India Cultural Association (NICA)**, which started celebrating festivals like **Lohri, Teejon** etc.

NICA's members and their families had been participating in Garbas enthusiastically. NICA's house magazine, called UTTARA, was regularly publishing the translated works of eminent poets of Gujarat in Hindi.

DEVELOPMENT of a RAM LILA program, UNIQUE to VADODARA: In 1981, two **Professor Mahendra Chaturvedi** and **Madan Lal Jhand** came together at **Railway Staff College (RSC)**, Vadodara in Gujarat. Before being posted to RSC, they both had initiated, in Assam, celebration of Ram Lila and Ravan Dahan, as it is done in the Northern parts of India. Shri **Shiv Prasad Dube** of RSC and **Professors Chaturvedi and Jhand** approached Professor Akshai Aggarwal of NICA, with a proposal to start the organization of a Ram Lila and Ravan Dahan program at Vadodara.



*October 11, 2023: Vadodara, Gujarat, India: meeting of NICA's Team*

In April 1981, jointly with the RSC team of **Dube, Chaturvedi** and **Jhand**, it was decided to organize the Ram Lila and Ravan Dahan program on the Vijaya Dashmi day only. Unlike the North, where the enactment of Lord Rama's story is done through folk dramas over the evenings of the first nine days of the month of Ashwin followed by the program of Ravan Dahan on the Vijaya Dashmi day, NICA decided to enact important parts of Lord Ram's history within 2.30 hours only on the day of Vijaya Dashmi.

In the North, the folk dramas are organized in every locality. In the city of Vadodara, it was to be done at one place for the whole of the city. So, it was decided to use an open stage of 120 feet by 40 feet, built in the middle of the large Polo Ground of the city so that people could sit on all the sides and enjoy the program.



*Polo Ground, Vadodara, Gujarat, India: NICA's 120x40 feet open stage*  
NICA had been organizing a Gujarat-wide One-Act play competition in Hindi. A member **Dr. R.S. Khanna**, who was working in the **National Dairy Development Board** (NDDB) was Chair of the "**Natya** (or Drama)" group. The Natya group

encouraged the members to participate in the One Act-Plays in the four different zones of NICA. The Group also organized the Competition.

NICA had also been organizing every year a “**Bhajan Sandhya** (Evening of devotional songs)” and a Panjabi Evening program of folk songs and skits in Panjabi language. **Mrs. Travinder Arora, an accomplished singer** chaired the Music Group. Mrs. Arora got a strong group from a group of members from the ONGC colony, Vadodara.

**Dr. Khanna, Shri Rajendra Goswami** along with a **professor from the Drama Department** of the College of Dance, Drama and Music. M. S. University of Vadodara took up the responsibility of enacting the drama, with the help of **Professor Madan Lal Jhand**. The script for the drama had been prepared by **Professor Mahendra Chaturvedi**. **Mrs. Tarvinder Arora** and her group took the responsibility for the accompanying music and background dialogues.

The drama was enacted by non-professional actors from the families of Members and other citizens, who came forward to participate. There were about **120 persons, who enacted different roles in the drama**. To train them and weld them into a team, which could make an interesting presentation before the citizens of Vadodara, which is known as **the cultural capital of Gujarat**, was a stupendous task. But it was done **superbly** by the NICA’s team.



*Oct 22: **Hotel Surya, Vadodara, Gujarat, India: Hasmukhbhai** at a NICA meeting*



For such a city-wide activity, the organizers would always face many issues.

TWO MAJOR ISSUES: After one month, the **Drama and Music Group**, the **Stage and Gound arrangement Group** and the **Effigies Group** presented their reports. It was found that the program would require a lot more funds, than envisaged in April 1981. Immediately after the reports were presented, a Member **Shri R. K. Behal** asked Professor Aggarwal to come out for a few minutes for some urgent issue. Shri Behal privately told Dr. Aggarwal that he **guaranteed to bear the entire shortfall**, which occurred after the donations were collected for the program.

The Organizing Committee led by **Sh H.K. Agarwal**, Director Finance at NDDDB, **Shri O.P. Rathi**, a Chartered Accountant, **Shri M. K Jain** of Sarabhai Chemicals, **Sh Keshav K. Mitra**, **Sh Harish bhai Agrawal of Gaurav Hotel**, **Sh Surjit Singh Setia, a Mechanical Engineer** in a factory in the industrial area in Vadodara was strengthened by a number of other members and friends. By the due date, NICA received donations, which were sufficient to meet the expenses and NICA was not required to use the generous offer by **Shri R.K. Behal**.

The second major issue arose when one week before the due date of October 8, 1981. In the city of Vadodara riots started. *(The city had a history of riots even during the 1920-1930 during the British colonial rule. The riots have stopped after April 2002, when as the Chief Minister of Gujarat State, was able to establish good governance.)* I was worried that a public program, where thousands of persons would assemble, a riot triggered by a few could lead to even a loss of life. But a senior Indian Police Officer took it as a challenge and he said that it would be a shame if NICA were to cancel a public program for fear of rioters.

It turned out that more than 100,000 citizens thronged the Polo Ground to witness the program in 1981. That day when at about 8 PM, when the program was over, and when most of the people left the ground peacefully, NICA's organizing Committee took a sigh of relief, with a bouquet of thanks for the IPS Officer.

*The writer of the above REPORT left NICA about 25 years back. He asks for apologies for forgetting to mention many important friends, who had helped in 1981. Kindly excuse him.*

**Note:** Please see a clip of the 43<sup>rd</sup> celebration of Ram Lila and Ravan Dahan program of 2023 at [https://youtu.be/QSSVq5eelow?si=XdOeAmqJrE25\\_CnU](https://youtu.be/QSSVq5eelow?si=XdOeAmqJrE25_CnU). It was sent by **Shri P.K.Gupta, President of NICA** today.