

Food, music and a few splashes of colour set for Holi celebration

When Jahnvi Ray came to Aurora in 2017, she often found herself looking for ways to celebrate festivals she'd been raised with closer to home.

On Diwali, for instance, Ray was used to homes being decorated in bright lights in a way she likens to Christmas, but was always ?sad? when she drove around and couldn't find a single house glowing in the night sky.

Now, just ahead of Holi, one of the most popular celebrations in Hinduism celebrating the triumph of good over evil, perhaps most typified by its use of colourful powders to decorate the face and body, Ray has teamed up with fellow residents of Aurora and Newmarket who share her roots for a community celebration on March 4.

This first local observance of Holi will take place at the Newmarket Community Centre on Saturday from 4 ? 8 p.m., and will feature authentic Indian snacks, Bollywood music, dance, and, to make sure there's not too much to clean up afterwards, a bit of the colourful powders that are synonymous with the festival.

?It's so exciting to know the community is growing and we can connect with each other now and celebrate our culture ? especially since our culture is so vibrant and full of fun,? says Ray. ?We live so far away from places like Mississauga and Brampton where you always have temples around and these communities where you can celebrate these festivals. I missed that sentiment a lot up north, but that's when we realized this would be an amazing opportunity to connect with each other and find an opportunity to actually continue celebrating all of our festivals together. Holi is our first one and I hope we can continue for every festival.

?I think every Indian who was born in India will relate to this sentiment: Holi means lots of food and lots of fun. When I was growing up, we lived in a big campus in India and on Holi, at 6 or 7 a.m., we would gather [with my four uncles] and we would play with the colours all the way to 1 p.m. playing non-stop, eating scrumptious food cooked by my mum, grandmother and my aunts, and it was a celebration to the extent I don't think anyone can imagine for the level of excitement and the level of fun that's experienced. It's a very warm feeling because you're connecting not just with your family but also your friends. We would go meet our neighbours, our community-members who play with colours, exchange sweets, and eat all kinds of Holi delicacies.

?Also, the biggest part signifies unity. The festival signifies boundless love. You forget any malice, any bad intent, and just hug the person and feel forgiveness towards that person. It has significance in our culture from that perspective. It has a little bit of religious connotation as well. Holi starts before the actual Holi festival. Like any other Indian festival, it's a series of activities that make this festival a wholesome experience. Here, it is a new community, we're still building that bond, and just for this time we're celebrating it for one evening where we will be coming together. We can't play with colours like we would in India? we're using organic colour powder and dabbing each other lightly with that powder on our forehead, cheeks, however people feel comfortable without making a mess in the halls!?

This Saturday's event is billed as an informal, kid-friendly mix and mingle ? ?you arrive and become part of our culture immediately? ? and there's no ?set expectations from anyone, as long as they're on their best behaviour, all we want is for everyone to enjoy and dance to the Bollywood music, the music from the dhol (drum) masters who will be playing traditional Punjabi music, and we will be dancing.?

If you're new to Holi and the use of colour, Ray recommends wearing white if you're going to partake and potentially garments you won't want to reuse.

The celebration will take place at the Newmarket Community Centre (200 Doug Duncan Drive) on March 4 from 4 ? 8 p.m. and is sponsored by Aurora's Aroma Indian Grocers, realtor Vadi Subramani, and Nk Gifts & Décor ? and further sponsorship opportunities are available. Tickets are \$25.

For more on the event, call 416-450-7980 or 647-649-4458.

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