

# KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

FEBRUARY 2026

WWW.KHAASBAAT.COM

EDITOR@KHAASBAAT.COM

813-758-1786

Inside:



Health  
Metabolic  
syndrome

4



Immigration  
Religious workers

6



Astrology  
February  
forecast

12



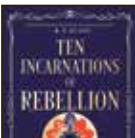
Classifieds  
Help wanted

14



Tax planning  
Tips/overtime  
pay

16



Books  
'Ten  
Incarnations'

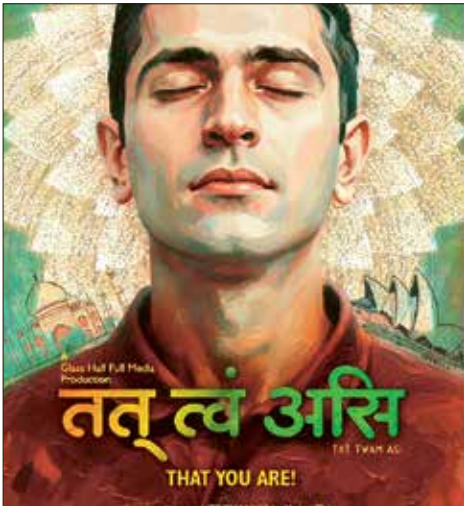
19



## GEAR UP FOR INDIA FESTIVALS ALL OVER FLORIDA!

MELBOURNE MARCH 7-8 • GAINESVILLE MARCH 7 • FORT MYERS MARCH 14

SEE PAGE 18



SOUTH ASIAN  
INDIAN  
FILM FEST

FEB. 20-22  
IN TAMPA

Story, page 8

TAMPA, FLORIDA  
PERMIT NO. 489  
PAID  
U.S. POSTAGE  
STANDARD  
PRESORTED

KHAAS BAAT  
8312 WINDSOR BLUFF DRIVE TAMPA, FL  
33647

# WHO'S WHO

Khaas Baat is a monthly publication that has been in circulation since August 2004. Issues are direct mailed to subscribers and also are available at South Asian grocery stores and restaurants. It presents exclusive, informative and relevant news about the Indian American community in Florida to its readers.

**EDITOR/PUBLISHER: NITISH S. RELE, M.A. IN JOURNALISM**  
**ASSOCIATE EDITOR: SHEPHALI J. RELE, M.A. IN JOURNALISM**  
**CREATIVE DIRECTOR: TIM LANCASTER**

**Khaas Baat, 8312 Windsor Bluff Drive, Tampa, FL 33647**  
**Phone: 813-758-0518 • e-mail: editor@khaasbaat.com**

Anything that appears in Khaas Baat cannot be reproduced, whether wholly or in part, without permission. Opinions expressed by Khaas Baat contributors are their own and do not reflect the publisher's opinion. Khaas Baat reserves the right to edit and/or reject any advertising. Khaas Baat is not responsible for errors in advertising or for the validity of any claims made by its advertisers. Khaas Baat is published by Khaas Baat Communications.



**ASHOK & BHANUBEN**  
**MITESH (MAC) : 407-252-8756**  
**KHASIYATORLANDO@YAHOO.COM**  
**RESTAURANT : 407-888-2147**  
**@KHASIYATORLANDO**



**WWW.KHASIYATRESTAURANT.COM**

## KHAASBAAT

A PUBLICATION FOR INDIAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA

**www.khaasbaat.com**  
**(editor@khaasbaat.com)**

**813-758-0518**

■ **ONE-YEAR SUBSCRIPTION: \$36**

**To subscribe please send this completed form and check addressed to Khaas Baat to:**  
**KHAAS BAAT**  
**8312 WINDSOR BLUFF DRIVE**  
**TAMPA, FL 33647**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card# \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## E V E N T S

### EVENTS

#### TAMPA/ST. PETERSBURG/PLANT CITY

##### FEB. 1: EAST-WEST MUSIC AND DANCE

**FESTIVAL;** organized by Shruti Foundation; 1 p.m.; Water Works Park, 1710 N. Highlands Ave., Tampa; free; multicultural event with music bands, dance performances, food, vendors; for information, call (813) 549-9288 or visit [www.shrutifoundationtampa.org](http://www.shrutifoundationtampa.org)

**FEB. 4: GSTB SENIOR DAY;** organized by Gujarati Samaj of Tampa Bay; India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; \$10 for GSTB members, \$15 for non-members; lunch and entertainment; for information, call Jitubhai Vora at (941) 962-9774.

**FEB. 10: HANUMAN CHALISA;** second Tuesday of month; Vishnu Mandir Tampa, 5803 Lynn Road; 7 to 9 p.m.; for information, call Deo Gajadhar at (813) 817-9714.

**FEB. 18: ICC SENIORS GET-TOGETHER;** India Cultural Center, 5511 Lynn Road, Tampa; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; free seminar, lunch and entertainment; only for 65 years and older; for information, text email address along with your name to Bhikhu Nayi at (631) 560-2718 to receive details about seniors gathering every month; or call Mahesh Modha at (813) 476-1540.

**FEB. 20-22: 3rd ANNUAL SOUTH ASIAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL OF FLORIDA (SAIFFF);** NCG Cinemas, 7999 Citrus Park Town Center Mall, Tampa; to purchase tickets, visit [www.saifff.org](http://www.saifff.org) or call (312) 933-2251.

**FEB. 21: "PARAMPARA: A CONTINUATION OF MUSICAL TRADITION;"** presented by Sangeetaalaya; IPAC Wesley Chapel, 8657 Old Pasco Road, Wesley Chapel; 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.; for tickets/info, call (813) 758-4916.

### SIGNIFICANT DATES

**FEB. 15: MAHA SHIVRATRI**

**FEB. 17: RAMADAN BEGINS**

**FEB. 28: FUNDRAISER 2026: MINDS MATTER;** organized by Pehchaan Tampa Bay, helping provide hope, resources and assistance to the South Asian diaspora; HCC Auditorium, Brandon, 10451 Nancy Watkins Drive, Tampa; 6 p.m.; \$50 tickets, \$30 student with dinner included; RSVP (813) 720-7115 or visit [www.pehchaan-tampabay.org](http://www.pehchaan-tampabay.org)

**MARCH 1: FLORIDA HOLI MELA;** organized by UrbanCraftShip; Sickles High School, 7950 Gunn Highway, Tampa; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; \$10 per person; purchase tickets at [www.floridaholimela.com](http://www.floridaholimela.com)

**MARCH 5-7: SPIFFS INTERNATIONAL FOLK FAIR;** presented by Saint Petersburg International Folk Fair Society (SPIFFS) and Volunteers of Indian Culture, Art and Science Society (VICAS); England Brothers Park, 5010 81st Ave. N., Pinellas Park; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; music, dance, crafts, and cuisine from various cultures, including VICAS; for information, visit <https://www.spiffs.org/>

**MARCH 7: HOLI;** presented by Tampa Indian Community Events, organized by Bharti Kapoor Panigrahi; Sisira Farms - The Aura Venue, 10575 Paul S. Buchman Highway, Plant City; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; discounted tickets of \$10 on sale until Feb 10 and available for purchase on [Sulekha.com](http://Sulekha.com) or via Zelle at (813) 893-9779.

*Cont'd on page 14*





**JD Patel, Esq.**  
 PERSONAL INJURY &  
 CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYER

EMAIL: [jd@greeklaw.com](mailto:jd@greeklaw.com)  
 PHONE: (727) 441-9030/ (813) 223-6405  
[www.tragoslaw.com](http://www.tragoslaw.com)

**LAW OFFICES OF**  
**TRAGOS, SARTES & TRAGOS**

*BASED IN CLEARWATER • SERVING CLIENTS ACROSS FLORIDA*

**PERSONAL INJURY**

CAR ACCIDENTS  
 SLIP AND FALLS  
 WRONGFUL DEATH

**CRIMINAL DEFENSE**

**CALL TODAY FOR A FREE CONSULTATION!**






# BUYING SELLING INVESTING

YOUR  
RESIDENTIAL  
AND  
COMMERCIAL  
AWARD  
WINNING  
TEAM



**SHEETAL 'SHELLY'  
SIDHU**



**BROKER ASSOCIATE  
RE/MAX PREMIER GROUP  
813.995.1600**



**SUNNY SIDHU**

**SAVE THOUSANDS WHEN BUYING OR SELLING WITH US**

**LIST WITH US AND GET TOP DOLLAR FOR YOUR HOME WITH  
OUR EXTENSIVE MARKETING STRATEGY**

[www.AllTampaHomes.com](http://www.AllTampaHomes.com)

## SIDHU GETS IT SOLD



**Tejal Dhruve CPA LLC**

Count on us to Account for you

Dhruve Wealth MGMT Group

Taxes | Insurance | Financial Planning



Florida  
29150 Chapel Park Dr.  
Wesley Chapel, FL 33544

813-675-3152  
[info@dhruvecpa.com](mailto:info@dhruvecpa.com)  
[www.DhruveCPA.com](http://www.DhruveCPA.com)

- Personal & Business Tax Preparation
- Small Business Accounting
- Payroll
- Retirement Planning
- College Planning
- Foreign Bank Account Reporting
- IRS Representation



Ohio  
5178 Blazer Parkway,  
Dublin, OH 43017



**25**  
YEARS  
OF  
EXPERIENCE

## IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

- 25+ years of experience
- 1 of only 78 lawyers in Florida to be Board Certified in Immigration and Nationality Law
- Florida's Super Lawyer in 2008 and 2009

We speak Gujarati.

**અમે ગુજરાતી બોલીએ છીએ.**



**Bhavsar Law Group**  
Attorneys & Counselors at Law  
Offices in Orlando

**407-425-1202**  
[information@kiblawgroup.com](mailto:information@kiblawgroup.com)  
[www.kiblawgroup.com](http://www.kiblawgroup.com)



**SANATAN MANDIR TAMPA**  
HINDU SAMAJ INC. (501 C (3) RELIGIOUS ORG)  
311 EAST PALM AVENUE, TAMPA, FL 33602







### February 2026 Events

**Sunday, February 1**  
Mugh Purnima  
Group Satya Narayan Katha  
Minimum 5 Sponsors

**Wednesday, February 4 (6:30-8:00PM)**  
Sankashti Chaturthi  
Shri Ganesh Havan  
Minimum 5 Sponsors

**Thursday, February 12 (8:00PM)**  
Vijaya Ekadashi  
Pooja & Aarti

**Saturday, February 14 (6:00-8:00PM)**  
Pradosh Pooja  
Group Shiv Pooja

**Sunday, February 15 (6:00 PM - 5:00AM)**  
Maha Shivratri  
4 Prahar Pooja (All Night)  
Shiv Pooja  
For sponsorship of all parts,  
please contact the Temple Manager or Temple Priests.

**Monday, February 16 (6:00-8:00PM)**  
Group Rudra Yagna  
Minimum 5 Sponsors

**Friday, February 27 (8:00PM)**  
Amala Ekadashi  
Pooja & Aarti

### Weekly Events

**EVERY MONDAY - 6:30 PM**  
• SHIV ABHISHEK AND PUJA

**EVERY TUESDAY - 7:00 PM**  
• SUNDERKAND PATH  
• HANUMAN CHALISA

**EVERY THURSDAY - 7:00 PM**  
• ALL SADGURU & SHIRDI SAI BABA  
BHAJAN SATSANG



Phone: 813-221-4482 | Email: [info@sanatanmandirtampa.org](mailto:info@sanatanmandirtampa.org) | Web: [www.sanatanmandirtampa.org](http://www.sanatanmandirtampa.org)



## METABOLIC SYNDROME

By DR. VENKIT IYER, MD, FACS



Years ago, we physicians had never heard about this syndrome. We knew about disorders such as diabetes mellitus, heart disease, hypertension, liver disease, kidney disease, stroke and obesity. We were taught that the different diseases affected older people. Currently, the organ-specific thinking has given way to systemic thinking about the health of the patient.

The term metabolic syndrome was coined about 25 years ago by the World Health Organization after recognising that the abnormalities had a commonality resulting from mitochondrial dysfunction and insulin resistance. It was noted

that this commonality manifested as high blood pressure/blood sugar levels/ LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol and high triglycerides along with high body mass index (BMI). If a person is found to have at least three of the above parameters, then the person is considered to have metabolic syndrome. This condition is a growing concern globally due to changing lifestyles and dietary habits.

### Diagnosis of metabolic syndrome is made by the following measurements:

- Central obesity: Excess fat around the abdominal area, often measured by waist circumference – more than 40 inches for men and 35 inches for women
- Elevated blood pressure: Blood pressure readings consistently above 130/85 mmHg.
- High fasting blood sugar: Fasting glucose levels above 100 mg/dL or HbA1C above 6.0
- High triglycerides: Levels above 150 mg/dL.
- Low HDL cholesterol: Less than 40 mg/dL in men and 50 mg/dL in women.
- High LDL cholesterol above 100 mg/dL.

### Several factors contribute to the development of metabolic syndrome, including:

- Genetic predisposition: Family history of diabetes or cardiovascular disease.
- Unhealthy diet: High intake of processed foods, saturated fats, salt and refined sugars.
- Physical inactivity: Sedentary lifestyle with minimal exercise.
- Age: Risk increases as one grows older, especially after 45 years.
- Ethnicity: Certain populations, including South Asians and African Americans are at higher risk due to genetic and lifestyle factors.

Metabolic syndrome does not present with any specific symptoms until very late when an organ dysfunction occurs. Only visible sign may be increased waist circumference. Routine health check-ups, including blood pressure, as well as blood tests are vital for early detection.

### If left unmanaged, metabolic syndrome can lead to serious health issues such as:

- Cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and heart failure
- Stroke
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus

- Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, cirrhosis of liver
- Chronic kidney disease
- Atherosclerosis resulting in blockage of arteries and thromboembolic episodes.

The underlying basic cause for this problem is believed to be mitochondrial dysfunction. Normal mitochondria inside the cells is responsible for energy management with substrate provided, converting glucose to ATP. When it is overloaded with glucose, it is unable to handle it, forcing some to be converted to fat. Moreover, the excess glucose makes the insulin ineffective, leading to insulin resistance. Further sequence of events and inflammation lead to individual organ damages. Metabolic syndrome can be described as a failure of energy management by the mitochondria, caused by excessive overload of substrate and inability to process it.

### Managing metabolic syndrome primarily involves lifestyle modifications:

1. Dietary changes: Adopting a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Limiting salt, sugar and saturated fat intake is crucial. Ultra processed foods are to be minimised.
2. Regular physical activity: Engaging in at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, five days a week.
3. Weight management: Achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight.
4. Smoking cessation and alcohol moderation: Avoiding tobacco products and limiting alcohol consumption.
5. Medication: In some cases, doctors may prescribe medicines to control blood pressure, cholesterol or blood sugar levels. Medications such as Metformin are used to control diabetes mellitus. Effective drugs are also available to control high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. New class of drugs called as Semaglutides or GLP-1 (Ozempic, Wegovy, Zepbound, Mounjaro) can be useful in reducing body weight and diabetes at same time. They work at the mitochondrial level increasing their number and efficiency, in addition to hormonal effects. Choice of medication will be decided by your physician.

With urbanisation and changing dietary preferences, the prevalence of metabolic syndrome is on the rise. Public health initiatives aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles and regular screening are essential to address the growing challenge.

Metabolic syndrome is a serious health condition with long-term consequences if not addressed on time. Early detection, lifestyle changes and appropriate medical intervention can significantly reduce the risk of complications. Regular health check-ups and awareness about beneficial living are key to prevention and management.

**Dr. Venkit S. Iyer, MD, FACS, is a retired general and vascular surgeon. He has authored six books: "Decision making in clinical surgery" first and second editions; "Aging well and reaching beyond," "The Clinic," "Geriatrics Handbook" and "Iyer's story book for children." They are available through Amazon or from the author. His website [venkitiyer.com](http://venkitiyer.com) has necessary links and contact information.**

## SPECIAL BUFFET MEAL

LIMITED TIME OFFER

**Daily Breakfast Buffet \$7.95**  
7:00 AM to 10:30 AM

**Daily Lunch Buffet \$9.95**  
11:00 AM to 03:00 PM

**Dinner Buffet \$9.95**  
9:00 PM to 1:00 AM

All Open 7 days Available

813-978-8586
 19050 Bruce B Downs Blvd, Tampa, FL 33647, United States

## Transform Moments Into Memories

peaceful, open-air setting for gatherings of all kinds.  
Surrounded by wide skies and natural beauty, the space blends rustic charm with modern amenities, creating a relaxed yet elegant atmosphere for weddings, celebrations, and community events.

[www.thepasturesinn.com](http://www.thepasturesinn.com)  
[thepasturesinn@gmail.com](mailto:thepasturesinn@gmail.com)  
 855-286-4569

30400 Darby Road  
 Dade City, FL 33525

# SAVE MONEY TODAY

Reduce your credit card  
processing fees

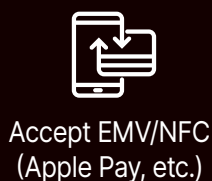
Rates As Low As 0.05%\*

Switch Now  
and get a

**FREE TERMINAL\***



Smart  
Terminal



Accept EMV/NFC  
(Apple Pay, etc.)



Pay-at-the-Pump  
Compatible



Next Day  
Funding



Standard  
Terminal

- ✓ Lightning-fast approvals & no setup fees
- ✓ Chip card & contactless payment acceptance (Apple Pay, etc.)
- ✓ Seamless integration with your current POS system\*\*
- ✓ One-time & recurring invoices that you can upload in bulk\*\*
- ✓ Emailable & textable receipts
- ✓ \$295 towards any early termination fees\*\*
- ✓ A secure online merchant portal
- ✓ Access to multiple online payment gateways
- ✓ Free printer paper, & more\*



Point of Sale Systems  
Recommendations,  
Solutions & Integrations

**ACCEPT  
EBT/Snap**



## OPTIONAL PROGRAM

**Accept Credit  
Cards Without  
Paying  
Processing Fees\***

Eliminate processing fees  
with the Edge Program\*,  
only from North. Edge is a  
true dual pricing program  
combining Flat Rate Pricing  
with Cash Discount.

## Save Money & Grow Your Business!

Go North. Call Today  
**866.481.4604**

**North**  
nynorth.com

©2025 North is a registered DBA of NorthAB, LLC. All rights reserved. NorthAB, LLC is a registered ISO of BMO Harris Bank N.A., Chicago, IL, Citizens Bank N.A., Providence, RI, The Bancorp Bank, Philadelphia, PA, and FFB Bank, Fresno, CA.

\*Merchant Classification restrictions apply. Dual signage pricing required. Other fees may apply. Contact North for more details. \*\*Some restrictions apply. Merchant agreement required.

Hardware is free for use while processing and must be returned upon termination of merchant agreement. Other fees may apply. Contact 866.481.4604 for details.





## GOOD NEWS FOR RELIGIOUS WORKER IMMIGRATION - PART I

By KHUSHBU PATEL and DILIP PATEL



One major problem faced by religious institutions and religious workers is the fact that Green Card processing times have increased significantly beyond the maximum five years a religious worker is allowed to remain in the United States in R-1 status before the worker has to return home for at least one year before starting the R-1 cycle again.

However, there's good news. On Jan. 14, 2026, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced an important change that stands to significantly impact religious organizations and

their communities across the United States. The DHS has issued an interim final rule that eliminates the previously mandated one-year foreign residency requirement for thousands of religious workers — priests, nuns, rabbis and other clergy — who have historically faced prolonged wait times before returning to serve in the U.S. The move is a notable development in immigration policy, blending legal, religious and administrative considerations.

### Background: The Historical Context

For years, religious organizations — comprising priests, nuns, rabbis and other spiritual workers — faced an arduous process to serve their communities in the United States after their initial visa periods. The existing rules mandated that religious workers who had reached the maximum statutory stay in the country (five years under R-1 religious worker visas) had to remain outside the United States for at least one year before they could return. This residency requirement aimed to prevent abuse of the visa system and ensure that religious workers maintained their ties abroad.

However, this requirement has long been a source of frustration for religious organizations, especially given the increasing demand for visas in the EB-4 category, which provides a pathway to permanent residence for religious workers. The demand has exceeded supply, leading to extended wait times and, in many cases, exhaustion of the maximum period for R-1 status. Further, this requirement resulted in prolonged absences, disrupting services, and creating hardships for religious communities that rely on consistent spiritual leadership.

The new rule, effective immediately, removes this one-year foreign residency prerequisite. Now, religious workers can return to serve in the United States without the mandatory hiatus, streamlining the process and reducing delays significantly.

### The New Rule: What's Changing?

The Department of Homeland Security's interim final rule, effective immediately upon publication, removes the one-year foreign residency requirement. Specifically:

- **Elimination of the Residency Requirement:** Religious workers who have reached their five-year maximum stay can now seek readmission to the United States without the prior obligation to reside outside the country for a minimum period.
- **Continuity of Service:** This change allows clergy and religious workers to return to their roles more swiftly, minimizing disruptions for faith-based communities that rely on their leadership. *To be continued...*

**Dilip Patel of Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, a board-certified expert on immigration law, can be reached at (813) 222-1120 or email [dilip.patel@bipc.com](mailto:dilip.patel@bipc.com)**

CDARS  
Member

**METRO CITY BANK**

Member  
FDIC

# Money Market

## Earn Up To 3.50% APY\*

\*APY=Annual Percentage Yield. See Rate Tiers\*\* Below.

- The rate is effective as of October 30, 2025 and subject to change without notice.
- The rate is only offered at our Tampa Branch and Houston Branch.
- Minimum \$1,000 to open.
- The tiered-interest rates will be based on the daily balance of your account.
- Account is subject to approval. Certain restrictions and minimum balance requirements apply.
- Rates may change after the account is opened. Fees may reduce earnings on the account.
- A \$5.00 Money Market Excessive Transaction Fee per debit will be imposed if over the six transactions limitation per month or statement cycle.
- A monthly balance requirement fee of \$10.00 will not be assessed when you maintain a minimum daily balance of \$2,000 or an average daily balance of \$2,500.

**\*\*Rate Tiers**  
Earn competitive rates based on the daily balance of your account.  
For balances of \$0 to \$99,999.99, the APY is 0.50%,  
For balances of \$100,000.00 and over, the APY is 3.50%.

"Metro City Bank is  
a wholly owned subsidiary of  
MetroCity Bankshares, Inc."  
(Nasdaq: MCBS)

**Tampa Branch**  
**(813) 848-0153**

[www.metrocitybank.bank](http://www.metrocitybank.bank)  
 6202 Commerce Palms Dr.  
Tampa, FL 33647

**813 344 0744,**  
**714 522 8200**

[info@pujatravels.com](mailto:info@pujatravels.com)  
[WWW.PUJATRAVELS.COM](http://WWW.PUJATRAVELS.COM)

**Toll Free: 1 866 554 7852**

**SPRING SPECIALS ON AIRFARE & TOURS**  
WE SPEAK IN GUJRATI, HINDI, PUNJABI & ENGLISH

**FLY  
AMD,  
DEL,  
BOM,  
MAA,  
BLR,  
HYD &  
MANY  
MORE  
CITIES !**

**BUSINESS  
CLASS,  
PREMIUM  
&  
ECONOMY**

- All-Inclusive vacation packages to Mexico, Aruba, Turks & Caicos, the Bahamas, Punta Cana, and Hawaii.
- Group tours to India, Japan, Europe, South Asia, African safari, and more with vegetarian/Jain meals.
- Cruises to the Caribbean, Alaska, Europe, Mexico, the Bahamas, and more.
- Cheap Airfare to London, Europe, South Asia, the Middle East, Australia & New Zealand & India.

**CALL NOW TO BOOK EXCLUSIVE FLAMINGO TOURS OR CONNECTING FLIGHTS**

## TOYOTA OVERHAULS 2026 RAV4 WITH ALL-HYBRID POWERTRAINS!

Test-drive story by **NITISH S. RELE** [motoringflorida@gmail.com](mailto:motoringflorida@gmail.com)

The best-selling small SUV in the United States just received a major overhaul. For 2026, all the Toyota RAVs will be hybrid or plug-in hybrid as the Japanese carmaker moves toward partial electrification of its vehicles. Thirty years on with over 6.4 million units sold and stronger than ever, the RAV4 family included an off-road Woodland edition into its fold couple years ago.

The beginning of the new year signals the end of the sole gas engine, replaced by a 2.5-liter naturally aspirated Atkinson inline-4-cylinder hybrid powertrain cranking out 236 horsepower and 172 pounds-feet of torque. It is coupled to two front and one rear electric motor. A 288-volt lithium-ion battery is recharged by energy captured as the driver applies the brakes or coasts. The SUV is mated to an electronically controlled continuous variable transmission that touts a regenerative braking system. The re-tuned independent MacPherson strut front and multilink rear suspension with stabilizer bars absorbs the bumps of rough surfaces with skill and sure-footedness. And the rack-mounted electric power steering is razor-sharp with a solid on-center feel.

Apart from eco – an efficient mode where the driver can control the throttle opening – and sport for feisty driving, the RAV4 uses EV, i.e. electric at lower speeds of up to 25 mph. The adventure-ready and rugged ride may weigh nearly 3,900 pounds but still can tow up to a remarkable 3,500 pounds.

Up front, a split satin-black hammerhead grille surrounds projector-beam LED headlights as the Woodland badge is distinctly visible up on the crossbars of the roof rails and the rear liftgate. The aggressive look of the robust SUV is further boosted by RIGID Industries' LED fog lamps. Step into the cabin and red orange accents on the stitching, center console lid and steering wheel grab your attention. All new is a 12.3-inch digital cluster as well as an improved 10.5-inch



**RAV4 AWD (WOODLAND)**  
**Tires:** P235/65R18 all terrain  
**Wheelbase:** 105.9 inches  
**Length:** 182 inches  
**Height:** 69.1 inches  
**Width:** 74 inches  
**Fuel capacity:** 14.5 gallons  
**Mileage:** city/hwy/comb: 41/36/39 mpg  
**Base price:** \$39,900  
**Web site:** [www.toyota.com](http://www.toyota.com)

infotainment system with customizable widgets, AT&T 5G connectivity for quicker answers ("Hey Toyota, let's go home!") by the virtual Voice Assistant, Spotify and SiriusXM with 360L streaming, and all-new dash-cam-like feature. Ground clearance increases to 8.5 inches while the hands-free power liftgate has also been redesigned. Other thoughtful touches include eight-way power driver and six-way manual front-passenger seats, dual auto a/c, 60/40 fold-flat rear seat, leather tilt/telescopic steering wheel, overhead sunglass holder and driver-side instrument panel storage bin.

Looking to venture into uncharted territory and test fresh dirt trails? Then the rugged capabilities of the Woodland trim swiftly and efficiently get to work. With a substantial new chassis, generous cargo capacity and price, the fuel-sipping RAV4 certainly deserves attention. Plenty of it if you are a beginner family or a first-time owner in search of a reliable, durable compact SUV.



# FLORIDA HOLI MELA - TAMPA

## FESTIVAL OF COLORS

**FOOD | PERFORMANCES | DJ | COLOR THROW | PHOTOBOOTH | GAME ZONE | TUG OF LOVE | MORE!**

DON'T MISS OUT - GET YOUR TICKETS NOW AT [FLORIDAHOLIMELA.COM](http://FLORIDAHOLIMELA.COM)

SCAN TO BUY TICKETS

@SICKLES HIGH SCHOOL

7950 GUNN HWY TAMPA FL

OUTDOOR EVENT

Entry Ticket

\$10 per person

Kids Under 5 Free!



1st March, 2026

11:00AM - 05:00 PM



UNITING COMMUNITIES THROUGH JOY, COLOR, AND CELEBRATION!

VIBRANT COMMUNITY FAIR - SHOPPING • FOOD • ENTERTAINMENT • FUN



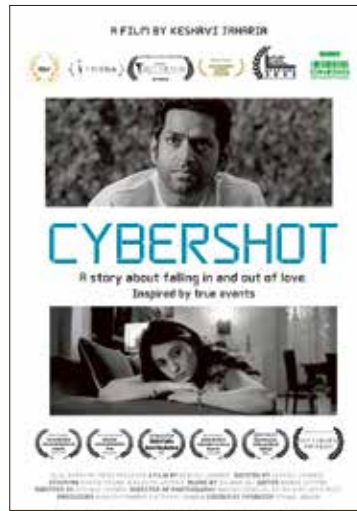
FOLLOW US ON









# SOUTH ASIAN INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL OF FLORIDA (SAIFFF)

## Story provided by SAIFFF

The South Asian Indian Film Festival Florida (SAIFFF) is returning to Tampa this February, bringing an exciting and diverse lineup of films and cultural experiences to the community. The third edition will take place Feb. 20-22 at NCG Cinemas (7999 Citrus Park Town Center Mall).

SAIFFF will screen 50+ films, including short films, documentaries and feature-length films, created by Indian and South Asian filmmakers from across the globe. Selected films represent countries such as India, Canada, Mexico, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, the United Kingdom, Bangladesh and Pakistan, showcasing powerful stories rooted in South Asian perspectives while reflecting global experiences.

The festival will kick off with the opening night red carpet premiere and reception on Friday, Feb. 20, at NCG Cinemas. Screenings will continue Saturday and Sunday, culminating in the awards ceremony on Sunday, Feb. 22. SAIFFF will offer a variety of activities, including meditation sessions, a Bollywood workout, and Bollywood dance parties on both Friday and Saturday nights.

Festival Director Hemant Dinkar shared that SAIFFF 2026 received a record number of submissions, with more than 50 films selected by a panel of judges. "The growth of SAIFFF reflects the incredible talent and storytelling emerging from South Asian creators

## RETURNS TO TAMPA FEB. 20-22

worldwide. We are proud to bring these voices to Tampa," Dinkar said.

Prominent Bollywood celebrities Omi Vaidya, Riya Sen and Aryan Vaid are expected to attend, along with 12-14 filmmakers from around the world.

The closing night film will be the U.S. premiere of "Hindi Vindi," starring Neena Gupta and directed by Sydney-based filmmaker Ali Sayed. The Australian-Indian feature film follows Kabir, a Sydney teenager of Indian descent who struggles with cultural identity and language.

SAIFFF 2026 is supported by Khaas Baat, NCG Cinema, Groundgame Health, Sakar Trust, The Neuropsychiatry & TMS Group (TNP), and Convergent Media, all united in promoting diversity, culture, and creative expression.

For more information, film schedules and ticket purchases, visit [www.SAIFFF.org](http://www.SAIFFF.org) or contact Hemant Dinkar at (312) 933-2251.

### Follow SAIFFF on Social Media:

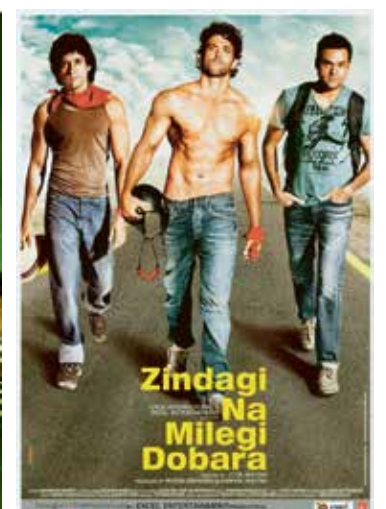
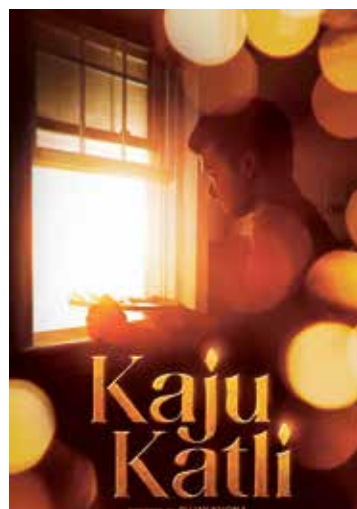
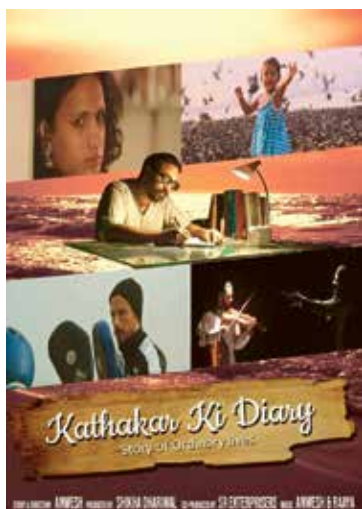
Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/saiff\\_florida/](https://www.instagram.com/saiff_florida/)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/saiffFlorida>

## A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS YEAR'S SHORT FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES INCLUDE:

- **"Kaju Katli"** – A grieving Marathi-American teen navigates loss, identity and healing through cooking during Diwali.
- **"Ismail"** – After failing school twice, a young man redefines success by forging his own unconventional path.
- **"Pestilence"** – A haunting coming-of-age story where a young boy's innocence erodes after a terrifying task.
- **"My Comrade"** – A wounded rebel finds refuge in a tribal villager's home, where politics and forbidden love collide.
- **"JAAR"** – Set in 19th-century Nepal, former lovers flee oppressive caste laws in pursuit of freedom and love.
- **"Almari Ka Achaar"** – A tender portrayal of quiet love and resilience between two middle-aged men.

"With support from the Consulate General of India, Atlanta, SAIFFF will be screening Sridevi's "English Vinglish" and Hrithik Roshan's "Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara."





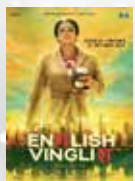


# South Asian Indian Film Festival, Florida

A 501(C)(3) NON PROFIT ORGANIZATION

## CINEMA. CULTURE. CELEBRATION.

Join Florida's Biggest Indian Film Festival in Tampa, FL  
featuring **50+ films** (short/feature/documentary), **red-carpet**, **dance parties**, and **awards**



**DATES**  
**FEBRUARY 2026**  
**20-22**  
FRIDAY-SATURDAY-SUNDAY

**VENUE**  
**NCG**  
**CINEMA**  
CITRUS PARK MALL, TAMPA

Three days of  
compelling cinema,  
celebrated artists,  
and cultural  
immersion from  
around the world.

**WALK ON RED CARPET**



**OMI**  
VAIDYA



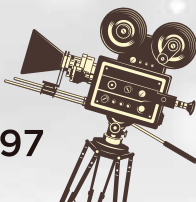
**RIYA**  
SEN



TICKET & SPONSORSHIP

**HEMANT/ANJANI**

Phone: (312) 933-2251 / (561) 573-6897  
Email: hemant@saiff.org



FACEBOOK



INSTAGRAM



WEBSITE



EXPERIENCE CINEMA

WWW.SAIFFF.ORG

CELEBRATE CULTURE

Designed at www.creativestudio24.us

# CAMPIDS

AT CORBETT PREP

STUDENTS ENTERING PREK3 THROUGH 8TH GRADE

**SUMMER 2026**

**6 WEEKS OF OPTIONS**  
**JUNE 8 - JULY 17**

**100+ FULL- AND HALF-DAY CAMPS**  
**BEFORE- AND AFTER-CARE**

813.961.3087 • www.corbettprep.com • campids@corbettprep.com

Corbett Preparatory School of IDS • 12015 Orange Grove Dr. Tampa, FL 33618



# PEHCHAAN Tampa Bay Inc

## FUNDRAISER 2026: MINDS MATTER

"Support our Mental Health Awareness fundraiser to help provide hope, resources, and assistance to the South Asian Diaspora in the Tampa Bay Area."

**FEB 28th  
6:00 PM**

**VENUE: HCC BRANDON AUDITORIUM**

**\$50 per ticket  
\$30 student ticket  
Dinner included with Ticket Purchase**

**SPONSORSHIP**  
Gold - \$1000 & up  
Silver - \$500  
Bronze - \$250

**Join us for an unforgettable evening with enchanting bollywood classics by Sonia Mukherjee and DJ Philipi**


**RSVP: 813-720-7115**  
(Tharangini Raman, Nandini Bandyopadhyay)

**Email: pehchaantampabay@gmail.com**

**www.pehchaan-tampabay.org**

# APEX

## Internal Medicine of Tampa



**Services provided for:**

- Annual Physical
- Wellness care for Medicare patients
- Diabetes care, high blood pressure, high cholesterol,
- Thyroid disorders
- Asthma/COPD
- minor infections

**Accepting Medicare, Aetna, Humana, Cigna, Blue Cross**

Mon-Fri 8 a.m.-5 p.m.,  
**EVENING** Appointments available on selected days

**Dr. Mukesh Satodiya, MD**  
Internal Medicine Physician

*More than 15 years of clinical experience*

**APEX INTERNAL MEDICINE OF TAMPA**

<b>New Tampa</b> 10353 Cross Creek Blvd, Suite D • Tampa, FL 33647	<b>Wesley Chapel</b> 30794 State Road 54, Wesley Chapel, FL 33543
--------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------

**813-725-4983 • www.Apeximt.com**

# THE BRIDGE TO COLLEGE

## WAITING FOR COLLEGE DECISIONS – WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

BY GERARD WENO AND ROBERT A.G. LEVINE



January through March: the time after applications is filed but before most admissions decisions are released. The clock ticks so slowly. The waiting is cruel, even harder on parents than it is on students. For those who did not achieve their "early" colleges, it's worse than you can imagine.

We say it all the time – line up a good safety school that will accept you early in the season – and life will be easier (and your essays will be better because of the confidence). Unfortunately, few people heed this advice. Gerard did, and at the beginning of the admissions season, he got a great engineering school: the Colorado School of Mines. Even so, wishing and wanting and waiting is just awful.

Here are some of Gerard's thoughts, grabbed from after his first "win" but before his "better" schools announced their decisions. Feel what he felt, that weird balance of fear and confidence, but remember: this was with a solid win in his pocket.

Like most, Gerard's racing thoughts began with a healthy dose of anguish:

"I've been reflecting recently, and I realize that a lot of the time when I ask you for advice, I'm actually looking for assurance. I'm scared ... I'm nervous ... I don't know what's going to happen ... OMG ... is my SAT score high enough? Was that extracurricular the right one? Am I chopped?!"

"The waiting season feels like I keep taking a voluntary dive deep underwater, then when I swim back to the surface, right as I'm about to take a much-needed gulp of air, something drags me back under!"

Then his mind started thinking that all the thinking was a necessary evil on the way towards victory:

"In this period of anguish, maybe it's good that I don't know what will happen. Imagine that every single time you boot up your favorite game, you know for certain that you will win. Very quickly, you would lose interest in that game. Imagine that when you begin the next episode of your favorite binge-watch, you know what's going to happen from the first minute and it's exactly what you want to happen.

"When it comes to admissions, knowing the exact steps to take and the exact order to take them, you would get bored and disinterested very quickly. Wouldn't that be a miserable existence?"

In his search for solace, Gerard even became philosophical:

"Maybe being uncertain is a privilege. Aren't we lucky not to know and live life anyways? Knowing that many questions will forever remain unanswered, we have the luxury of asking ourselves difficult questions. In a way, uncertainty makes life worth living!"

But this feigned positivity didn't last long:

"Hey, I've been having some good luck recently, so maybe it will extend to next week's decisions! Or am I insane? Maybe I'm just yapping because of my fear ... hahahahaha..."

Maybe it's not insanity, perhaps folly or frenzy or just absurd. The future is unpredictable, and so are admissions decisions. Unlike universities in most of the world, U.S. colleges generally do not make decisions in a linear fashion based upon grades and test scores. Moreover, their decisions are not a judgment on a student's value or an adult's parenting.

Trust me: waiting for their decision can be even more difficult than understanding their decision. So, what to do?

My first advice is to "be healthy." Get enough sleep, exercise appropriately, eat the right foods ... you know what to do. And, especially for parents, consider a vacation in February (which is by far the cruelest month of waiting).

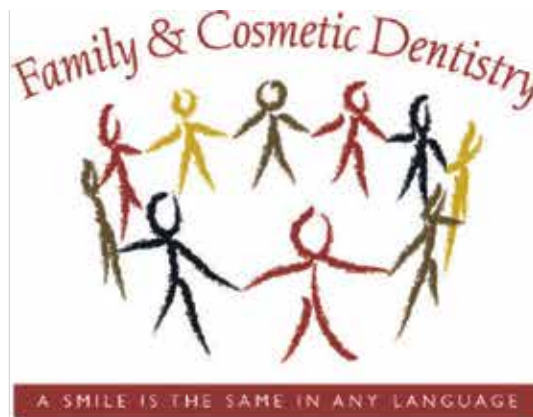
Second, re-read your application essays. Remind yourself of the quality of your admissions work. Our students write world-class essays. They make our hearts rise and re-reading them will rejuvenate your soul.

Third, enjoy the ride. High school is almost over. That social institution, for better or worse, has been your daytime home for almost the entirety of your life. Things change when you graduate. Current friends become acquaintances and then memories, not daily companions. The best mental and emotional help occurs when you live in the present, not when you dwell on the past or hope for the future.

Trust me: your success will be based upon your good work, not on the brand name of a university, a major you select, a class or a professor. Your life will be determined by you, not by others.

**Robert Levine is the founder and CEO of University Consultants of America, an independent educational consultancy assisting students around the world with applications to colleges, universities and graduate schools. For more information, call University Consultants of America, Inc. at 1-800-465-5890 or visit [www.universitycoa.com](http://www.universitycoa.com)**





Dr. Jasthi

## Beautiful Smiles

Created by: Dr. Neeraja Jasthi

High Tech Digital Dental Office

Crowns • Veneers • Implants

**Invisalign®**  
Braces without wires

**ZOOM!™**  
Professional Whitening System

Most Insurance  
and Credit Cards Accepted  
Finance Options Available

20441 Bruce B. Downs Blvd.  
Tampa, FL 33647

*Across the Street from Wharton High School  
Just North of Wal-Mart*

New Patients Welcome

**(813) 866-9913**

[www.drjasthi.com](http://www.drjasthi.com)

**Cinematic Video & Photography**

**Krishna**  
VIDEO & PHOTO STUDIO

**Dilip Panchal 863.651.8899**  
**Lakeland, Florida**  
**kvp1758@gmail.com**

**NEW YORK LIFE**  
The Company You Keep

**Dinesh Gandhi**  
CA license # 0G95100

Qualified Member MDRT 2009-2010-2013  
Financial Services Professional\*  
New York Life Insurance Company

Licensed Agent  
Life Insurance - Long Term Care Insurance - College Funding  
IRA Funding - Key Person Protection

**Cell 727 858 4123**  
**dpgandhi@ft.newyorklife.com**

LLC, Member FINRA, A licensed Insurance Agency  
3109 West Mlk Blvd, Suite 300 Tampa FL 33607

**Happy Valentine's Day!**

# Dental Excellence ...

## Compassionate Personalized Care!!!



Dentistry done differently! Bliss Dental Lounge offers a luxurious spa-like dental experience. Equipped with the latest innovative technology and services which include general dentistry, Invisalign, Implants, Botox/fillers and much more.

Dr. Sheetal's 20+ years of expertise and all-women's team by her side, you are sure to feel like a member of the Bliss Family! Her warm and gentle approach to your dental care will exceed your expectations and ensure your journey to dental wellness is as seamless and stress-free as possible.

**Schedule online today!**



### FREE

**Invisalign consultation plus up to \$1,000 OFF treatment.**

With this coupon.  
Offer expires Mar. 31, 2026

### \$25 OFF

**New Patients 1st Visit**

Restrictions apply.  
With this coupon.  
Offer expires Mar. 31, 2026

### FREE

**Second Opinion**

With this coupon.  
Offer expires Mar. 31, 2026

**CONTACT US 813-995-6178**

**17735 Hunting Bow Cir. Lutz**

**www.blissdentallounge.com Bliss Dental Lounge**



## Here's the deal, home + auto = savings.

**Ardeshir K Khorsandian Ins Agt**  
Adi Khorsandian, Agent  
20752 Center Oak Drive  
Tampa, FL 33647  
Bus: 813-991-4111

\*Average annual per household savings based on a 2021 national survey by State Farm® of new policyholders who reported savings by switching to State Farm.

State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company  
State Farm Indemnity Company  
State Farm Fire and Casualty Company  
State Farm General Insurance Company  
Bloomington, IL

State Farm County Mutual Insurance Company of Texas  
State Farm Lloyds  
Richardson, TX

State Farm Florida Insurance Company  
Winter Haven, FL

2001299

Combine home and auto and save an average of \$1,127\*. I'm ready to help you get the right coverage at the right price. Call me for a quote.

**Like a good neighbor,  
State Farm is there.®**



## A S T R O L O G Y

### FEBRUARY FORECAST

By PANKAJ KOHLI



**ARIES / Mesha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (March 21-April 20) Mars Sign - Stars covered Ashwini, Bharani, Kritika (1st Part)** February brings sustained momentum with a need for refinement. Efforts initiated earlier now demand patience and strategic execution. Professional matters show progress through disciplined follow-through rather than haste. Financial plans should be based on realistic assessment. Well-thought-out relationships benefit when emotion is balanced with realistic situations. The month supports steady action, vitality as well as emotional maturity.

**TAURUS / Vrushabha (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (April 21-May 21) Venus Sign - Stars covered Kritika (last 3 parts), Rohini, Mrigashira (first 2 parts)** February brings emotional balance with inner security. Professional responsibilities may increase; consistency and commitment ensure recognition. Cautious investment and long-term planning may be required in financial matters. Relationships deepen through loyalty, commitment and reassurance. Health matters show improvement through staying on regular nourishment course. The month supports strengthening foundations and being emotionally stable.

**GEMINI / Mithuna (Air sign, ruling planet is Mercury) - (May 22-June 21) Mercury Sign - Stars covered Mrigashira (last 2 parts), Ardra & Punarvasu (first 3 parts)** The month enhances communication and problem-solving skills. Professional opportunities may arise through proper dialogue or networking. Revisit earlier plans, fine-tune them according to time and opportunities the situations might present for better execution. Financial decisions only benefit when analyzed practically. Emotional clarity grows when situations are analyzed in true perspective. The month focusses on being adaptable and applying practical ideas in life.

**CANCER / Kataka (Watery sign, ruling planet is Moon) - (June 22-July 22) Moon Sign - Stars covered Punarvasu (4th part), Pushya, Aslesha** February focuses on sharing greater responsibility and emotional grounding. On work front, things may need extra care with a steady effort, which may bring appreciation and recognition. Family matters require compassion and calm communication. Financial stability may improve through proper budgeting and planning. One may feel inner peace, which grows through reflection, prayer and creative expression. The month supports nurturing others while protecting personal boundaries.

**LEO / Simha (Fire sign, ruling planet is Sun) - (July 23-Aug. 22) Sun Sign - Stars covered Magha, Purva Phalguni, Uttara Phalguni (1st part)** The month highlights being consistent and persistent to becoming a good leader. Recognition follows those who try with sincere and purposeful efforts and ethical conduct. Creative talents receive appreciation, especially in group settings. Financial gains may come through professional handling of situations. Relationships flourish through generosity and warmth. This month supports sustenance, confidence and purposeful action.

**VIRGO / Kanya (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Mercury) (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) Mercury Sign - Stars covered Uttara Phalguni (last 3 parts), Hasta, Chitra (first 2 parts)** February favors organization and skills refinement. Professional progress comes through attention to detail and methodical work. Financial matters stabilize with careful monitoring. Health improves by maintaining balanced and disciplined routines. Emotionally, flexibility brings harmony. The month supports steady improvement and practical wisdom.

**LIBRA / Tula (Air sign, ruling planet is Venus) - (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) Venus Sign - Stars covered Chitra (last 2 parts), Swati, Vishakha (first 3 parts)** The month focuses on cordial and harmonious actions whether family or in professional environment. Career-focused partnerships and teamwork may bring positive outcomes. Financial planning requires weighing options patiently. Relationships grow through diplomacy and mutual respect. Artistic or spiritual pursuits bring inner satisfaction. The month supports being balanced as well as emotional for inner satisfaction.



On your mark... Get set...

# SUMMER!

June 1 - July 31, 2026

**Summer at Shorecrest** offers a wide variety of exciting full day and half day camps in St. Petersburg for children ages 4-18.

SPORTS

ARTS & CRAFTS

COOKING

YOGA

CODING

THEATER & MUSIC

MARTIAL ARTS

... and MUCH MORE!

• Lunch included for full-day campers • After care available until 5:30pm

Learn more at: [www.shorecrest.org/summer](http://www.shorecrest.org/summer)

Scan for more information



Summer  
at Shorecrest

## FEBRUARY FORECAST

Cont'd from page 12

**SCORPIO / Vruschika (Water sign, ruling planet is Mars) - (Oct. 24-Nov. 22)**

**Mars Sign – Stars covered Vishakha (4th part), Anuradha, Jyestha** February brings greater determination and being more strategic in thinking. Professional advancement is possible through focused effort and being persistent. Financial growth follows those who have a well-planned map. Emotional connections are built based on trust and openness, which should be at their core. The month means slow transformation through patience and self-control.

**SAGITTARIUS / Dhanush (Fire sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Nov. 23-Dec. 21)**

**Jupiter Sign – Stars covered Moola, Purva Shada, Uttara Shada (first part)** The month focuses on learning and being self-driven. Professional growth is supported through moving in the right direction, determination and expansion of knowledge. Financial prospects improve with proper planning and setting realistic expectations. Relationships form having shared ideals and through honesty. The month encourages one to be more optimistic and guided by practical vision.

**CAPRICORN / Makara (Earthen sign, ruling planet is Saturn) - (Dec. 22-Jan. 20)**

**Saturn Sign – Stars covered Uttara Shada (last 3 parts) Shravana, Dhanishta (first 2 parts)** February strengthens commitment and perseverance. Professional efforts show tangible results through structured work. Financial stability improves with disciplined savings. Relationships need warmth alongside shared responsibility. The month supports long-term planning and steady progress.

**AQUARIUS / Kumbha (Air sign, ruling planet is Saturn) – (Jan. 21-Feb. 19)**

**Saturn Sign - Stars covered: Dhanishta (last 2 parts) Satabhisha, Purva Bhadra Pada (1st 3 parts)** February highlights innovation and responsibility. Professional ideas gain acceptance generally when applied practically. Financial matters benefit from periodic review. Emotional connections deepen through sincerity and shared goals. The month supports aligning ideals with real-world action.

**PISCES / Meena (Water sign, ruling planet is Jupiter) - (Feb. 20-March 20)**

**Jupiter Sign - Stars covered: Purva Bhadra Pada (last part) Uttara Bhadra Pada, Revathi** The month is helpful with increased intuition and having emotional clarity. Professional matters progress through creative insight and compassionate

leadership. Financial matters bring relief, peace and stability. Relationships grow through proper understanding and spiritual bonding. The month supports inner growth, healing and gentle forward movement.

**For detailed horoscope analysis and chart reading, courtesy Pankaj-Astro Jyotish, call Pankaj Kohli at (905) 910-1441 or e-mail [Pathofastrology@gmail.com](mailto:Pathofastrology@gmail.com)**



**Amit Dehra, Attorney at Law**

LL.M, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

LL.B, Punjab University, Chandigarh, India

**IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY**

**DEHRA MIOTKE, LLC**

**Legal Services provided:**

- Family-based Immigrant Visa Petition
  - Employment-based Nonimmigrant Visa Petitions (H-1B, E-1/E-2, L-1A/L-1B, etc.)
  - Employment-based Immigrant Visa Petition
  - Deportation Defense • Asylum • Naturalization
  - And all types of representation before the U.S.C.I.S. and the U.S. Immigration Court • U Visa, Federal Court Litigation
- Practice Limited to Immigration & Nationality Law only.*

**Call us on update for new immigration policy**  
**We speak: Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi**

**FULL SERVICES IMMIGRATION LAW FIRM**



**TAMPA**  
5404 Hoover Blvd,  
Unit 26,  
Tampa, FL 33634  
(813) 221-0733

E-mail: [adehra@dmimmigration.com](mailto:adehra@dmimmigration.com)

**ORLANDO**  
5401 S. Kirkman Rd.,  
Suite 310  
Orlando, FL 32819  
(407) 965-2455



# CLASSIFIEDS



To list your classified ad (for sale, help wanted, services offered, matrimonials), call (813) 758-1786 or e-mail [editor@khaasbaat.com](mailto:editor@khaasbaat.com)

## MATRIMONIAL

Hindu parents seek a suitable alliance for their U.S.-born son, 34 years, 6'0", never married, handsome, and of excellent character. He is a successful physician-entrepreneur, has no student loans, and is professionally well established. He is well-settled in Los Angeles and owns a spacious home in an upscale neighborhood. We seek a U.S.-born, never-married, professionally educated female with strong family values and no vices, who wishes to build a future and settle in Los Angeles. Caste no bar. Kindly email biodata with a recent candid photograph to: [LosAngelesShah@gmail.com](mailto:LosAngelesShah@gmail.com). We shall be pleased to reciprocate more with our son's details and photograph.

## HOME FOR SALE

Enjoy comfortable, low-maintenance living in this move-in ready home located in Anand Vihar, a gated 55+ community in Wesley Chapel. Start your day on the screened lanai with peaceful conservation views. Inside, the home features ceramic tiles throughout and an open floor plan ideal for entertaining. The upgraded kitchen offers modern appliances, soft-close cabinets and ample prep space. The spacious owner's suite includes crown molding, dual walk-in closets and a large walk-in shower. A second bedroom and full bath provide comfort and privacy for guests. Just steps away, the Anand Vihar clubhouse offers a fitness center, steam room, heated pool, social lounge, and an on-site vegetarian cafeteria serving

Indian cuisine. Community events and well-maintained grounds create a welcoming, active lifestyle. Conveniently located near shopping, dining, medical facilities and major highways, Anand Vihar combines relaxation, wellness and cultural connection in one exceptional 55+ community. Priced \$483,900. Contact: Sejal Shukla at (813) 503-2014 or [Realty@SejalShukla.com](mailto:Realty@SejalShukla.com)

## HOME FOR SALE

Two-bedroom house in Anand Vihar 55+ community in Wesley Chapel/Tampa area. End home with one side protected woodland and at backside clean pond with fountain. Good furnishing with ceiling hanging beautiful Indian royal swing. Call Bhasker Desai at (717) 926-8610.

## SERVICES OFFERED

Fully licensed Home Health Care Agency serving Florida area for In Home Care. We provide many services, including Companion, Personal, Mobility Assistance, Errands, Housework, Kitchen Prep, Bathing, Medication Reminder. Indian staff available. Contact Amit Shukla at (813) 919-5555 or email [Amit@AssociationHomeCare.com](mailto:Amit@AssociationHomeCare.com). Association Home Care [www.AssociationHomeCare.com](http://www.AssociationHomeCare.com)

## HELP WANTED

Tampa restaurant is looking for servers, food runners and front host. Good pay. Call (972) 900-1526 or email [minervatampa@gmail.com](mailto:minervatampa@gmail.com)

# FLORIDA NEWS

## MINDS MATTER: PEHCHAAN FUNDRAISER SET FEB. 28 IN TAMPA

Story provided by Pehchaan

Entering our 20th year, we at Pehchaan feel immensely grateful to have this wonderful community on our side. Through challenges and rough paths, we have managed to grow and thrive.

On Feb. 28, we are having our 20th anniversary fundraiser and we would love to have you by our side and spread our message: everyone should know that they are not alone and that Pehchaan and our community is here to help and assist in whichever way possible.

Mental well-being wasn't always a part of our everyday conversations. South Asians often avoid or ignore the challenges we all face, like alienation in a foreign land or the cultural conflicts of bringing up second-generation children. Many have tried to pretend that these issues were unimportant, or bore the burden in silence, because reaching out for help was considered a sign of weakness.

But things are gradually shifting. We are starting to talk about mental health without shame or fear. Parents are taking their children to therapy, and couples are going for counseling. Survivors of domestic violence are recovering, rebuilding. We'd like to think that Pehchaan has helped this change come about, through our various workshops, awareness seminars, and support sessions over the past 20 years. We have worked hard to support our community's mental health.

Please join us and support our community. The fundraiser will be from 6 p.m. at HCC Auditorium, Brandon, 10451 Nancy Watkins Drive, Tampa. Tickets are \$50 and \$30 student with dinner included. RSVP (813) 720-7115 or visit [www.pehchaan-tampabay.org](http://www.pehchaan-tampabay.org). Details are in the ad below.

## EVENTS

Cont'd from page 2

### ORLANDO/CASSELBERRY/WINTER PARK

**FEB. 7: KEERTHANA – INDIAN AMERICAN YOUTH ORCHESTRA;** musical gala presented by Hindu Society of Central Florida; HSCF temple hall, 1994 E. Lake Drive, Casselberry; 4 p.m.; free; donations welcome; for information, call Muthusamy Swami at (407) 902-8910.

**FEB. 7: INDIA DAY;** Kia Center, 400 W. Church St., Orlando; 5 to 7 p.m.; pre-game festivities at Fan Fest, Indian food, on-court performances, followed by Orlando Magic vs. Utah Jazz; for information, visit [www.iaccorlando.com](http://www.iaccorlando.com) or email [info@iaccorlando.com](mailto:info@iaccorlando.com)

**FEB. 19: 3rd ANNUAL SIP & SOCIALIZE;** educational networking event by Indian American Business Association and Climate First Bank, 1150 S. Orlando Ave., Winter Park; 6 to 9 p.m.; free for IABA members, \$40 non-members; for information and to RSVP, visit <https://www.iabausa.com/wine26>

### FORT MYERS/NAPLES

**FEB. 7: INTERGENERATIONAL PAINTING EVENT;** organized by India Association of Fort Myers; Vino's Picasso, 15250 S. Tamiami Trail, Fort Myers; 3 to 6 p.m.; \$20 children, \$42 adults; for information, visit <https://www.iaftmyers.org/>

### SOUTH FLORIDA (POMPANO BEACH)

**FEB. 7: NAMASTE!** presented by Standard Land Development; Grand Indian art and food festival; Pompano Beach Amphitheatre & Grounds, 1806 N.E. Sixth St., Pompano Beach; 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.; free entry/parking; visit [www.namastefl.com](http://www.namastefl.com)

**Disclaimer: Event details are subject to change. Please check with local organizers. Event submissions are free, e-mail information to [editor@khaasbaat.com](mailto:editor@khaasbaat.com) by the 20th.**



SEEMA RAMROOP, CRPS®  
Financial Professional  
The Prudential Insurance Company of America  
2300 Curlew Rd Ste.212  
Palm Harbor, FL 34683  
[seema.ramroop@prudential.com](mailto:seema.ramroop@prudential.com)

## INSURANCE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

Insurance Issued by The Prudential Insurance Company of America, Newark, NJ and its affiliates.  
PAM-211





- HORS D'OEUVRES
- OPEN BAR
- AUTHENTIC PUNJABI CUISINE
- VEGETARIAN OPTIONS AVAILABLE



# TAMPA BAISAKHI MELA

An Elegant Evening of Culture, Community & Celebration  
DINNER | DANCE | MUSIC | ENTERTAINMENT



**SATURDAY, APRIL 4TH 2026**

**5:30 PM - MIDNIGHT**

at

**INDIA CULTURAL CENTER**

**5511 LYNN RD. TAMPA, FL 33624**

*Formal / Elegant Attire*

**ELECTRIFYING CULTURAL DANCE  
PERFORMANCES**

**HIGH ENERGY DJ & DHOL**

*Dance the Night Away!*

**BOOK NOW!  
TICKETS ARE SELLING FAST**



**Scan to book!**

FOR MORE INFO: EMAIL at [PUNJABITAMPA@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PUNJABITAMPA@GMAIL.COM) • Text or Call Sunny Sidhu: 813-995-1600 or Vinay Taneja: 617-653-0647

# THE RAM LAW FIRM PA

IMMIGRATION ATTORNEYS

Now open in  
**TAMPA**

at

15310 Amberly Dr. Suite 250  
Tampa, FL 33647  
(813) 726-9338

*Our Attorney*

**Ram Balaraman, ESQ**

PRACTICE LIMITED TO IMMIGRATION  
AND NATIONALITY LAW.  
We also speak ESPAÑOL and PORTUGUÊS.



*Orlando Office*

5812 S. Semoran Blvd  
Orlando, FL 32822  
(407) 270-9554

[www.ramimmigrationlaw.com](http://www.ramimmigrationlaw.com)

*Our Services*

Employment Work Visas

Investor / EB-5

Deportation Defense

PERM

EB-2 NIW

EB-1

TPS

DACA

Family Based Visas

Citizenship

Naturalization

Inadmissibility Waivers

Non-Immigrant Visas

DED

New Immigration Policies



## VEDIC POOJA VIDHI (METHOD)

**“For a Pooja to be beneficial,  
it must be done in Your Name,  
Gotra, Nakshatra, Rashi Lord, Isht  
Devi/Devata, and Lagna Lord”.**



Also know your **“Janmaank or Lucky No.”**,  
**“Tattwa or Element of Air, Water or Heat”** in  
your body; coz **imbalance of these Tattwas’**  
**is the root cause of our ailments!**

If you don't know the above, contact,  
**Astrologer and Vedic Mantra Therapist,**  
**Pankaj Kohli** to create your Horoscope and  
perform a Personalized **Pooja that Blesses**  
**YOU with Positive results.**

Call: Pankaj Kohli, Astrologer & Vedic Mantra Therapist  
**T: 905-910-1441**

## AccountTax Services

**“PROUD TO BE BORING ACCOUNTANTS”**

- Monthly & Quarterly Bookkeeping
- Payroll & Sales Tax
- Personal Tax Returns
- Business Tax Returns
- New Business Formation
- Business Licensing
- SNAP (EBT) Retailer Services
- WBENC (Women Owned Business) Certification
- Debt Consolidation Assistance
- Management Svc for Sr. Citizens
- Check Cashing Business Services



**BOB PATEL**  
(407) 710-5818  
bob@accounttaxservice.net

2323 TOPAZ ISLE LANE • APOPKA, FL 32712

**Srinivasa Charyulu**  
Freelance Priest

Namah Kodandahastaya  
Sandhikrutasharanyacha  
Khandakhiladaitya  
Ramayapanniratin

**Priest Srinivasa Charyulu**

### All Hindu Religious Services Performed at Home and Community

**Services:** Ganapathi Homam • Sathya Narayna Vratam • Gruha Pravesham  
Sai Vratam • Kalyana Uthsavam • Wedding Ceremony, Vaastu & Shradham, etc. | **Languages:** Hindi • Telugu  
Tamil • Kannada • English

**Cell: (813) 735-0188**

20716 Whitewood Way, Tampa, FL 33647

**E-mail: srinivasa.acharyalu@gmail.com Web: www.acharyalu.co**

## CAN YOU CLAIM A TAX DEDUCTION FOR TIPS OR OVERTIME INCOME?



*By TEJAL DHURVE, CPA*

If you received tips or overtime pay in 2025, you may be eligible for a new deduction when you file your income tax return. Both deductions can be claimed whether or not you itemize deductions. But various rules and limits apply. Also be aware that such income may still be fully taxable for state and local income tax purposes. And federal payroll taxes still apply to tips and overtime income you deduct for federal income tax purposes.

### Deducting Tips

Eligible taxpayers can deduct up to \$25,000 of annual qualified tips income. The deduction begins to phase out when modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) exceeds \$150,000 (\$300,000 for married couples filing jointly). It's completely phased out when MAGI reaches \$400,000 (\$550,000 for joint filers).

Qualified tips can be paid by customers in cash or with credit cards or given to workers through tip-sharing arrangements. The tips deduction is available if you receive qualified tips in an occupation that's designated by the IRS as one where tips are customary. Some examples of eligible occupation categories are beverage and food service, hospitality and guest services, personal appearance and wellness, and transportation and delivery.

The tips deduction is allowed for both employees and self-employed individuals. However, those who work in certain trades or businesses (such as health, law, accounting, financial services, investment management) are ineligible.

### Deducting Overtime

Eligible taxpayers can deduct up to \$12,500 of qualified overtime income (\$25,000 for joint filers). The deduction begins to phase out when MAGI exceeds \$150,000 (\$300,000 for joint filers). It's completely phased out when MAGI reaches \$275,000 (\$550,000 for joint filers).

Qualified overtime income is overtime compensation mandated under Section 7 of the Fair Labor Standards Act. It requires time-and-a-half overtime pay except for certain exempt workers. Only the extra "half" constitutes qualified overtime income and thus is deductible.

Qualified overtime income doesn't include overtime premiums that aren't required by Sec. 7, such as those required under state laws or pursuant to union-negotiated collective bargaining agreements.

### Reporting Requirements

Under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, qualified tips income must be reported on Form W-2, Form 1099-NEC or another specified information return or statement furnished to both the worker and the IRS. And qualified overtime income must be reported to workers on Form W-2 or another specified information return or statement furnished to both the worker and the IRS.

However, the IRS announced that for the 2025 tax year, there will be no OBBBA-related changes to federal information returns such as Form W-2, Forms 1099 and Form 941. The IRS is providing transition relief for the 2025 tax year and will update forms for the 2026 tax year.

Contact the office for help determining your eligibility for one or both of these deductions.

**Tejal Dhruve, CPA, LLC, a full-service tax and wealth management firm with offices in Wesley Chapel, Florida, and Dublin, Ohio, can be reached at (614) 742-7158 or email [info@dhruvecpa.com](mailto:info@dhruvecpa.com)**



TIKARAM UNVEILS PAAN LIQUEUR: A BOLD FUSION OF HERITAGE AND INDULGENCE

TAMPA, FL — November 1, 2025 – TikaRam Spirits, the South Asian inspired premium spirits brand known for blending tradition with innovation, proudly announces the launch of TikaRam Paan Liqueur, the first-ever craft spirit to capture the bold, nostalgic flavor of Paan in a refined, world-class liqueur.

Infused with the vibrant flavors of rose, cardamom, fennel, Gulkand, and spices. TikaRam Paan Liqueur pays tribute to the post-meal ritual cherished across generations, yet designed to enhance modern cocktails. This Paan liqueur blends craftsmanship and culture into a single, unforgettable sip. “This isn’t just a drink — it’s a statement,” says Vidita aka “Tika”, Co-Founder of TikaRam Spirits. “With TikaRam Paan Liqueur, we’re showcasing the flavors of our heritage and presenting them to the world with elegance, luxury, authenticity, and unapologetic pride.”

Key Features:

*Crafted Flavor: Authentic notes of traditional Paan, refined through ultra-premium distillation.*

*Heritage and Innovation: where science meets nostalgia.*

*Versatile Profile: Ideal for sipping, mixing, and flavor enhancing, or elevating desserts and chai.*

Limited quantities available in selected retailers for the holiday Season through our National Distribution partner EasternLiquorUSA, check our website and instagram on where to purchase [www.tikaramspirits.com](http://www.tikaramspirits.com) | @TikaRamSpirits | @EasternliquorUSA



Leading **HINDU FUNERAL SERVICE** in Tampa

Our HINDU SERVICE PACKAGE includes...

- Top-tier funeral service, cremation conducted same day, premier crematory located on our premises.
- Custom HINDU focused design rental casket.
- Funeral Service accessories per the Pandit Ji.
- Live internet streaming of the Funeral Service.
- Spacious Chapel with generous seating.
- Ample parking facilities.



Call today

813-920-4241 • 727-376-7824

12609 Memorial Dr. • Trinity, FL 34655





# GEAR UP FOR INDIA FESTIVALS ALL OVER FLORIDA!

**MELBOURNE MARCH 7-8; GAINESVILLE MARCH 7; FORT MYERS MARCH 14**

By **NITISH S. RELE** – [editor@khaasbaat.com](mailto:editor@khaasbaat.com)

**MELBOURNE:** Manav Mandir will present its 29th annual Indiafest on Saturday, March 7, and Sunday, March 8, at Wickham Park, 2500 Parkway Drive, Melbourne. The fun family event brings Indian culture to the Space Coast with cultural and fashion shows, henna, arts and crafts, Indian cooking demo, food, raffle drawings, etc. This year's theme is "Dynamic Women of India," which honors the contribution of Indian women, coinciding with International Women's Day. Timings are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$4 for children 12 and under; kids younger than 5 years are free.

This festival is unique in its commitment to giving back to the community. Indiafest is a non-profit, cultural organization known for its charitable efforts to local charities, including the parent organization, Manav Mandir. With community support, the organization has raised and donated over \$1.4 million to date. Last year's selection were Aging Matters of Brevard, which serves meals to the senior population and, Children Hunger Project, which provides food to elementary school kids for the weekend who would otherwise go hungry. This

year's selection is WAYS for Life, a nonprofit offering wraparound youth services to at-risk young adults, including those transitioning out of foster care and experiencing homelessness. For information, call Nina Gadodia at (321) 779-0110, e-mail [info@indiafestbrevard.org](mailto:info@indiafestbrevard.org) or visit [www.indiafestbrevard.org](http://www.indiafestbrevard.org)

**GAINESVILLE/ALACHUA:** Presented by the India Cultural & Education Center, India Fest (Traditions of India) will be held on Saturday, March 7. It will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Legacy Park Multipurpose Center, 15400 Peggy Road, Alachua. There also will be Indian food, music/dance, fashion, jewelry, etc. For information, email [indiafest@icec-florida.org](mailto:indiafest@icec-florida.org) or visit [www.icec-florida.org](http://www.icec-florida.org)

**FORT MYERS:** The India Association of Fort Myers (IAFM) will hold its annual 35th India Fest on Saturday, March 14, at Alliance for the Arts, 10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers. The noon to 8 p.m. event will feature Indian food, dance, henna, music, handicrafts and clothing. More specifically, there will be live entertainment throughout the day, including modern and classical dances, and fashion shows.

**For information, email [indiafest@iafortmyers.org](mailto:indiafest@iafortmyers.org) or visit <https://www.iaftmyers.org/>**



**DYNAMIC WOMEN OF INDIA**

**Cultural Shows, Indian Cuisine, Fashion Show, Music, Henna, Cooking Demo, Arts & Crafts, Great Raffle Prizes, Yoga & More!**

**MANAV MANDIR** मं

Presents

# Indiafest

**SATURDAY, MARCH 7: 10:00AM – 6:00PM**  
**SUNDAY, MARCH 8: 11:00AM – 5:00PM**

**Wickham Park**  
**2500 Parkway Dr. Melbourne, FL**

**Advance tickets can be purchased at**  
**[IndiafestBrevard.org](http://IndiafestBrevard.org)**

Adults: \$8.00  
 Children under 12: \$4.00  
 Children under 5: Free



**Indiafest proudly supports**



\* No Pets Allowed Except Service Animals

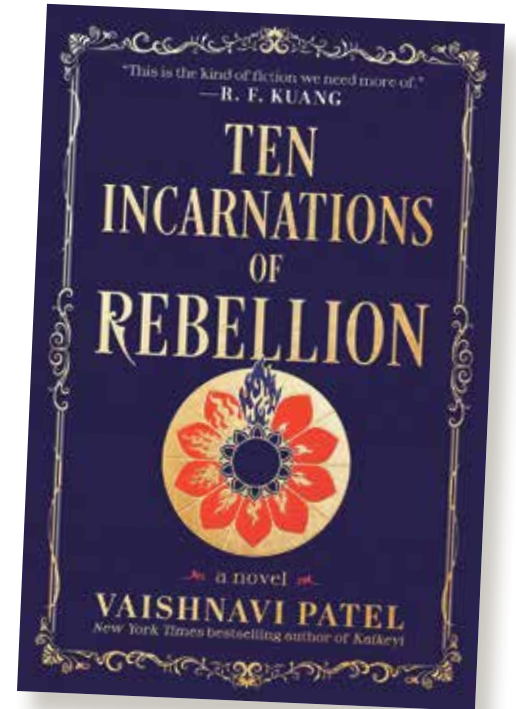


## BOOK REVIEW



**"Ten Incarnations of Rebellion" by Vaishnavi Patel; 300 pages; \$29 (published by Ballantine Books; [www.randomhousebooks.com](http://www.randomhousebooks.com))**

What if the British had never left India in 1947 and stayed on to rule well into the 1960s by violently cracking down on freedom movements and protests? It is this alternate history that Vaishnavi Patel tackles in 10 chapters/incarnations of Vishnu with sheer brilliance and clever tact. Essentially, each chapter of this well-structured book, beginning with a moral and concluding with a tale, represents a year in the protagonist's life. In the first chapter, "Matsya, Fish," Patel writes, "I learned how to hope at nineteen. It started with a song. I did not, could not, know what was to come—the blood that would stain the streets, the fire that would fill the skies, the scars that would carve our souls—but even if I had, still I would have chosen it. Still I would have set myself on the path of rebellion." And in the final chapter, "Kalki, Restorer," she reveals. "I learned how to believe at twenty-eight." Set amid the backdrop of a Bombay that has been burned down, rebuilt and renamed Kingston, the story highlights the struggle for Independence by the young central character Kalki Divekar (daughter of a revolutionary), her Dalit friend Yashu and Fauzia. Since women were looked down upon and unlikely to participate in any insurrection, the trio obtain jobs in the British government. Despite religious strife and caste/internal divisions, the freedom fighters aren't swayed in their fight to save Kingston. The city is in disarray with rebels being hunted down and young men drafted to wars, never to return home. Acts of sabotage bring them on the cusp of near death. At the same time, they find a few surprising allies. That the British Empire was a scheme of violence and terror is historically true, notes Patel in her Author's Note. The book looks to examine the sacrifices and strength necessary to achieve independence, "the selfishness and selflessness that go hand in hand in revolution, and the necessity of building coalitions across differences and dismantling indigenous forms of oppression ... 'Ten Incarnations of Rebellion' is a love letter to those who fought and an exhortation to keep fighting. The struggle is never over." Indian and British history buffs will appreciate the bibliography at the end. Author of the thought-provoking "Kaikeyi" and "Goddess of the River," Patel has penned a gem of a 'rebellious' novel that should serve to inspire freedom fighters around the world to persevere despite all odds.



## 2026 ANNUAL INDIA FEST PRESENTS

# royal INDIA

**March 14th 2026**  
**Alliance for the Arts**  
**10091 McGregor**  
**Blvd, Fort Myers, FL**  
**33919**  
**12pm- 8 pm**  
**[www.iaftmyers.org](http://www.iaftmyers.org)**

**Magestic Fashion Show**  
**Royal Photo Booth**  
**Jewelry & Fine Goods**  
**Henna Beauty Bar**



**Tickets**

**Tickets: Scan The QR Çode!**

**Artist & Vendor Openings Still Available!**

**[contact@iafortmyers.org](mailto:contact@iafortmyers.org)**



# MALANI

Valentine's  
Day



**FREE** Pearl  
Necklace  
on any jewelry purchase of **\$1500 or more.**

Valid Until Feb 17th. In-showroom & Online.



**Showroom in Tampa**

14424 N Dale Mabry Hwy  
Tampa, FL - 33618  
☎ 8138664653

[MALANIJEWELERS.COM](http://MALANIJEWELERS.COM)

