

**Embassy of India  
Havana**

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**Festival of India in Havana, October 2013.**

A gala Indian Cultural Festival was organized in Havana, Cuba from 24th October to 5th November, 2013. The rich, diverse and long cultural heritage of India was presented to the Cuban public in the form of 7 components, namely performing arts (classical dances), visual arts, literary workshop, yoga festival, food festival, and film festival both at the cinema and on two Cuban television channels. This Cultural Festival was conceived to take place during the visit to Cuba of the Honorable Vice President of India, Mr. Hamid Ansari, from 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2013.

**Food Festival** took place at Hotel Nacional, the flagship hotel of Cuba, from 24<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October where four Indian chefs from ITDC, specially brought to Havana for this occasion, who prepared authentic Indian culinary delights and cast their spell on hotel guests, special guests and the Indian delegation including the Honorable Vice President. Cuban people were delighted beyond words, common expressions included: **“this is a celebration of the senses”**, **“flavors combined in such a way as to get to your heart as well as your taste”**, etc. Media covered the inauguration of this Food Festival on 24<sup>th</sup> October and widely advertised the excellence of the Chefs and the appreciation of the general public.

**Indian Food  
Festival**

GAURAV MALHOTRA  
Team Leader



A **classical dance show** called **Nrityarupa**, a mosaic of Indian dances, was especially choreographed by Sangeet Natak Academy for the connoisseurs of Cuba. Dances like Manipuri, Kathak, Kathakali, Odissi, Chhau and Bharat Natyam were combined in a seamless show splashed with lights, music and artists' magnificent command of each dance's features. This show was presented at Mella Theater one of the most prestigious theaters of Havana, on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October, free of charge for the public. The Honorable Vice President of India graced the performance on 29<sup>th</sup> October and officially inaugurated the Cultural Festival, with the ceremony of the lightning of the lamp, a deeply spiritual and moving moment which connected Cubans and Indians, beyond language and idiosyncratic differences. Mella Theater has a seating capacity of around 1500 seats, which were filled both on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. A Mendhi artist specially brought to Havana was on hand at the lobby on 29<sup>th</sup> October, to give the gathering a taste of this art. Cuban women attending the performance queued for 2 hours to get their hands done by this artist. Artists received a standing ovation and were given bouquets by prominent Cuban artists and leaders like Mr. Rafael Bernal, Honorable Minister of Culture of Cuba, Mrs. Gisela Gonzalez, President of the National Council of Performing Arts, Mrs. Daisy Estable, Director of Mella Theater, among others. A group photo was taken to capture that special evening, with Honorable Vice President of India and his spouse, H.E Mr. C. Rajasekhar, Ambassador of India in Cuba, Mr. Ravindra Singh, Vice Minister of Culture of India, among others.



**Crowd in Mella Theater lobby before the inauguration of Festival of India, with Nrityarupa show**



Cuban Minister of Culture, H.E Rafael Bernal, and First Vice Foreign Minister, Mr. Sierra convey deep appreciation to Hon' Hamid Ansari, Vice President. Ambassador Rajasekhar & Mr. V Srinivas, JS look on.



Excited crowd waiting to get their hands done by Mehndi artist, specially brought from India for the Cultural Festival in Havana



Seamless ensemble of Indian classical dances "Nrityarupa" performed to packed audiences by Sangeet Natak Akademy at Mella Theater, Havana, Cuba, October 2013.



SNA choreographer, director and artists receiving standing ovation from Cuban audience.

This Indian classical dances performance was not only presented in Havana, but was also taken to the Province of Pinar del Rio, western most province of Cuba, on the 31<sup>st</sup>, where it was welcomed with huge elation and was widely appreciated. Reviews in local newspapers highlighted the presence of children in the audience who were absorbed by the charming combination of colorfulness, music and dancers' skilled performance.

Another component of this Festival was the **painting exhibition**, conceived as a spiritual dialogue between Cuban and Indian artists. For this collective exhibition, abstract and surrealistic painter Narendar Reddy travelled all over from India to present his work to the consideration of Cuban anxious spectators. Also from India, post-impressionist artist Sanjiv Nath displayed his deeply spiritual work. Zaida del Rio, prominent and highly decorated Cuban visual artists presented part of her collection entitled "The Cosmic Dance of Shiva" which was inspired by her recent trip to India. To complete the group of four stars, Ernest Garcia Peña from Cuba happily joined this exhibition with a selection of his best pieces. Talent and good energies coincided to make this "Spiritual Confluences: India and Cuba" a genuine symbol of the long-standing friendship between the two countries. This exhibition was open to public since 28<sup>th</sup> October to 5<sup>th</sup> November, and artist Narendar Reddy and others exchanged on daily basis with the media and general public, strengthening the knowledge

and appreciation of Indian visual arts in Cuba. The shrine of friendship and cooperation between nations in Havana, Casa del Alba Cultural, graciously opened its doors to host this exhibition.



**Ambassador Rajasekhar officially inaugurating Painting Exhibition with celebrated Cuban painter Zaida del Rio and Indian artist Narendar Reddy.**



**Ambassador Rajasekhar with Cuban Director of International Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Director of the House of Alba.**

Also at Casa del Alba, one of the most popular components of this Festival took place: **the literary event**. Prominent writers from India, SA, including poets, essayists and novel writers, travelled to Havana to be welcomed by their Cuban counterparts, who in a fraternal spirit connected with their work instantly. Reading sessions, workshops and discussions went on from 2.00pm to 4.00pm, 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> October. Cuban and Indian poets and writers delighted one another with their dazzling talent and scope. Cuban panelists included prominent poets and writers like Mr. Miguel Barnet, President of the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists, Mrs. Nancy Morejón, 2013 National Literary Award, Mr. Pablo Armando Fernandez, Mr. Alex Pauside and Mrs. Aitana Alberti. Ministry of Culture of India attended the event has described it as “**spectacular**”



First day of the 3-day literary workshop between Indian and Cuban poets and writers, one of the most popular components of the Festival of India in Havana, Cuba, October 2013.



Cuban Minister of Culture, H.E. Mr. Rafael Bernal with group of Indian poets and writers and top officials from Ministry of Culture, India.

One of the elements of this Cultural Festival more widely appreciated and enjoyed by the people was the Cinema Festival which had two parts to it: Chaplin cinema 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October, on 30<sup>th</sup> October witnessed the premier of Ek Tha Tiger. Impact of this movie largely shot in Havana was such that still people are calling our Mission and emailing about getting copies of the movie or to show it again, this time on television. At the inauguration of the Festival, Mr. Gaurav Bansal from NZDCC addressed Cuban audience and could witness the warm welcoming of Indian films in Cuba. A second part of this cinema festival was conceived so that Indian movies could reach every Cuban, beyond the Capital city and the limitations of one Cinema. From 24<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> October, a total of 8 movies were shown on Channel Multivision, and 10 movies were shown on Channel Habana from 26<sup>th</sup> October to 5<sup>th</sup> November. The appreciation of the larger public has been recorded in the radio, newspaper and local TV stations.

Last but not less important, **a yoga festival** was organized from 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October at wonderful Club Abreu Fontan, facing the Atlantic Ocean. International masters like Yogacharya Tonmoy Shome and Mrs. Mary Paffard

travelled from abroad to join Cuban instructors and masters in the lecture program as well as practical classes, meditation and restoration sessions, etc. Program was divided in 2 sessions: from 9.30 am to 1.00 pm and from 2.30pm to 5.00 pm. Over 300 people participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> day, and an average of 200 people daily could enjoy the benefits of the ancient practice of yoga.



**Yogacharya Tonmoy Shome, at Yoga festival inauguration ceremony, accompanied by Ambassador Rajasekhar, Mr. Regalado Vicepresident of India-Cuba Friendship Association and Mrs. Concepcion Campa, President of Finlay Institute & promoter of Ayurveda and macrobiotics**



**Yoga festival's practical session, Havana, Cuba, October 2013.**

The Mission has started preparations for the Cultural Festival early. Secondly, it was conceived as a dialogue between the peoples and the artists. This was accomplished by connecting with the relevant cultural institutions, such as the National Council of Performing Arts, the National Council of Visual Arts and the Cuban Association of Writers and Artists and co-opting them into

the process right from planning stage. Special t-shirts were designed, publicizing the Festival, which also added color and excitement. Finally, the venue were tastefully decorated, presenting Indian look.

The Cultural Festival of India in Cuba was greatly appreciated by one and all, as evidenced by the wide coverage on the National media, including a one-hour long TV show "Open Dialogue", at prime time on the national television channel.

Recently, a gala event was organized at Mella Theatre in Havana. The special programme was organized to felicitate the best cultural performances of the year 2013. Apart from the Cuban performances, Chinese (Acrobatic performances '*An Evening of Beijing*') and India were specially chosen for the top honours. India was conferred the Cultural Event of the Year for the Performance, '*Nrityarupa*' ensemble of Indian classical dances. Presenting a citation, the President of the Cuban Council for Performing Arts has asked Ambassador Rajasekhar to convey their deep appreciation and gratitude to the Government of India and also requested for more Indian cultural presentations.

A few sample news clips, photos and brochure are attached.

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