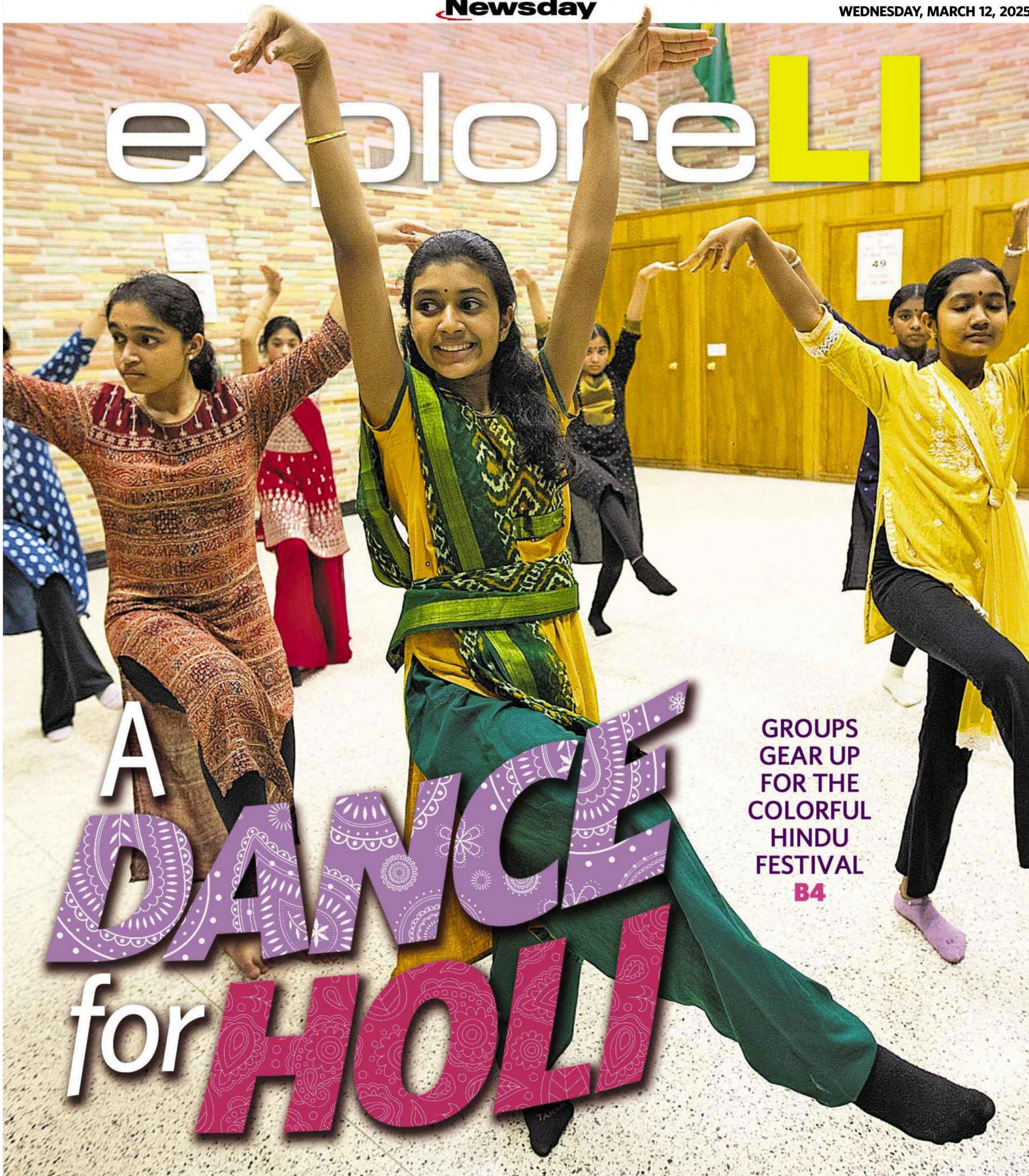


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A DANCE for HOLI

GROUPS
GEAR UP
FOR THE
COLORFUL
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Stepping up for HOLI



ON THE COVER Young performers from the Hamsaasya School of Dance, also at right, rehearse at Levittown Hall in Hicksville for their upcoming Holi performance.

Dance groups help celebrate the colorful Indian festival

BY VALERIE KELLOGG
Special to Newsday

As most children celebrating Holi get busy this time of year throwing colorful powder at one another, girls and boys at the Syosset-based Hamsaasya School of Dance are also throwing on colorful garb and dancing, another vibrant part of the annual Indian festival.

The Hindu celebration of Holi, falling this year on Friday, heralds the arrival of spring, say Long Island Indian Americans. Dance is integral, whether the moves derive from folk or classical moves in Indian dance or from Bollywood-influenced films, they say. Dances for the Festival of Colors, as Holi is known, might incorporate flowers, another ode to the season, says Hamsini Jamboor, 40, artistic director at the school, which holds classes in Syosset, New Hyde Park and Hicksville.

"Dance is a very big part," she says, taking an equally important spot with food, music and other festivities with family members and friends.

FEELING 'ENERGIZED'

The Hamsaasya School of Dance will perform this season next on March 23 at Vedic Heritage in Hempstead.

"I love Holi dancing," says Surya Maddipatla, 13, a student who's in the seventh grade at Candlewood Middle School in Dix Hills. The fast-paced beats in the music, he says, require "a bunch of moves, really quick rapid moves" that help tell Holi stories, including the triumph of light over darkness.

Fellow dancer Nagarishi Rapolu's favorite part of this year's Holi choreography is a backbend in one number. Dancing makes the 13-year-old Jericho Middle School student feel

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Lekha Parth, 12, and other students at the Nartan Rang Dance Academy rehearse a Holi dance at the Christ Lutheran Church in New Hyde Park.



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Hamsini Jamboor, artistic director of the Hamsaasya School of Dance, leads students as they rehearse for a Holi performance. At left, students practice their moves. "Dance is a very big part" of Holi, Jamboor says.

HOLI PERFORMANCES

WHAT The Hamsaasya School of Dance will perform at a Holi event featuring dance and other festivities.
WHEN | WHERE 5 to 8 p.m. March 23 at Vedic Heritage, 111 Jerusalem Ave., Hempstead
INFO Free; 516-965-2931

WHAT The Srijan Dance Center will be featured in Holi: A Festival of Colors!, with crafts, food and more, according to a museum news release.

WHEN | WHERE Noon to 4 p.m. April 6 at the Long Island Children's Museum, 11 Davis Ave., Uniondale
INFO \$18 adults and children older than 1; 516-224-5800, licm.org

WHAT The Nartan Rang Dance Academy celebrates its 20-year anniversary with a special program.

WHEN | WHERE 5 p.m. June 22 at the Adelphi University Performing Arts Center, 1 South Ave., Garden City
INFO \$30; 516-236-7879, nartanrang.com

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"energized," he says.

For Alyssa Mammoottil, the 12-year-old's pink and blue Holi outfit is a highlight, she says. But it's also the routine. "I love the dances because they have so much expression in them," says Mammoottil, who's in the sixth grade at Candlewood, "and it's kind of like acting."

A DANCE FOR A DEITY

Abha B. Roy from the Srijan Dance Center in Richmond Hills, Queens, commis-

sioned a new song seven of her troupe members will dance to during an April Holi performance at the Long Island Children's Museum in Uniondale, she says. Roy, 63, the center's founder and director, says she recently traveled to Delhi, India, to oversee the studio recording of the 16-minute piece.

The expressive Northern Indian dance to poetry and singing, known as Kathak, which she choreographed and directed, tells the story of the

god Shri Krishna and tricks he plays on four gopikas, or milkmaids, devoted to him. "Because they understand that he is the embodiment of love, they are able to see wisdom and feel delight even when he annoys or irritates them," Roy explains by email.

The Srijan Dance Center will perform other dances as well, some featuring students.

CONTINUING TRADITION

On Long Island, the merry-making will continue long

after Holi is over. Nine teens from the Nartan Rang Dance Academy, based in New Hyde Park and Hicksville, will perform a Holi dance during its annual show in June at Garden City's Adelphi University Performing Arts Center.

Siddhi Vaishnav, 43, creative head of the academy founded by her mother, Swati, chose a "Bollywood remix" of the 1990s song "Holiyaan" for the girls to dance to. The tune, with Hindi lyrics, is featured

on the soundtrack for the 2024 action film "Vedaa." The choreography calls for "a lot of movement of the hips . . . and flare in the hands," she says.

Each dancer will be dressed in her own spring color, Vaishnav adds. Attire includes a blouse, a long skirt known as a lehenga and a scarf called a dupatta. Each girl will also wear a tikka, a piece of jewelry with a dangling bauble that sits on the forehead, says Vaishnav.