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## The Digital Journey

### *Marathi Culture and Festivals Diwali Magazine*

Like most Indian American immigrants, I grew up celebrating our myriad festivals in a grand and traditional manner. When I moved from Indore to Los Angeles after getting married there was initially a feeling of nostalgia - even emptiness - when our cultural and religious celebrations occurred and I missed my family and large circle of friends in India.

To keep the happy memories alive I started writing about our festivals, their relevance in modern times, how to perform those rituals and their meaning on my Facebook page. I wrote mostly in English because I observed that the first generation of Marathi-Americans born here could not read Marathi. The younger immigrants that had recently arrived here in US had not gotten a chance to learn the details of the festivals and how to celebrate them. They expressed a lot of interest in knowing about our rich cultural traditions and festivals.

So, the next step was to launch the website [www.marathicultureandfestivals.com](http://www.marathicultureandfestivals.com) in **2013**. I got help from local community members and my sister-in-law Mrs Shobana has been my mentor and co-editor since day one. They all stand by me for any questions or honest feedback and I think this is a blessing. I got very positive feedback and so formed a group on Facebook under this same name; today we have over 13,000 active members from various countries.

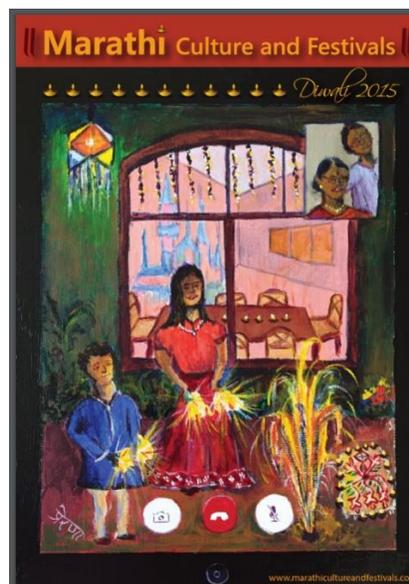
Diwali being our biggest festival, we started a separate page for it on the website and gave information related to it including recipes and how to make decorations at home. Since Maharashtra is known for its literary heritage and robust Diwali *ank/magazine* publications, so in 2015 we decided to issue a separate digital magazine. And I thought that it should be more than sharing festival information, we wanted everyone to participate and share their thoughts and talents. The vision was to create a global digital platform for people with Marathi background.

It was not easy to get people involved - to ask them to write for us for the first time. I had to reach out to various bloggers, writers, artists and scholars to request their participation. We formed a team for our first Diwali digital

magazine. I requested Mr. Ashutosh Bapat, well known for his informative articles on the internet, and he happily agreed to join our team. We divided our area of work: Shobha *tai* helped with English content, Mr. Bapat helped with Marathi content.

But there was a big road block: we were stressed to have received only about 30 poems, so I contacted various bloggers to share our vision with them and finally we received very good articles before the publication deadline. The next step was to design it! Who is going to do the layouts? And who is going to volunteer for this? What would be on the cover?

After initial search I requested Mrs. Prerana Kulkarni who is a local artist and asked if she could paint a theme poster for our cover depicting Diwali being celebrated in USA and grand parents in India are watching through face-time. She made a beautiful painting on this theme and this was our cover for our first Diwali digital magazine **2015**:



The cover part was done! Now what about the layout? Prerana suggested Mrs. Ashlesha Kelkar who was a new comer to LA and a graphic designer and she agreed to design inside pages and put together all the content. She started working with me, and honestly, I was going with my wild imagination of design not knowing a thing about how actually a graphic design program works. My son Ajeet who has a passion for computer programming and knew basics of Adobe programs, jumped in to rescue and became a bridge between me and graphic

designer. It took a lot of hard work on Ashlesha's part to volunteer for this magazine; I cannot thank her enough for doing this.

This encouraged me to take classes on graphic design basics; I got to know different Adobe programs, it was indeed a very fruitful learning experience. And by the time it was almost time for our second Diwali magazine 2016. I decided to design the cover in my class with the help of my teacher. We thought why not involve younger generation to participate? And have them on the cover wearing all our traditional outfits, my daughter who is a fashionista and already has a blog on fashion, agreed to become our model. My friend Deepali volunteered for makeup and Anika enjoyed wearing all traditional attire and jewelry.

For **2016** issue, Ashlesha was not available, so we asked Mrs. Manik Sahasrabudhhe with whom I worked with during BMM 2015 LA convention. She agreed to design inside pages. So, together we 'rode the wave' - mostly by her but at least I could help her out this time. Content wise it was very good as we already had a foundation in the digital magazine world from the first magazine.

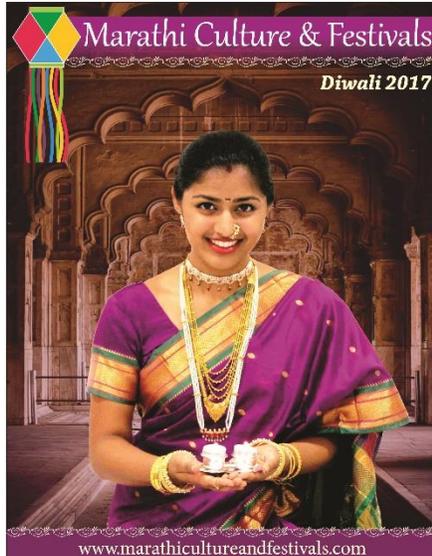
### Diwali 2016 cover



Diwali magazine **2017** was much easier. There were new additions to our team: Mrs. Sheetal Rangnekar as cover designer, Mr. and Mrs. Mate helped with additional Marathi content; we had a youth section to encourage them to write and share their thoughts about our culture and traditions, Mrs Smita Dandekar

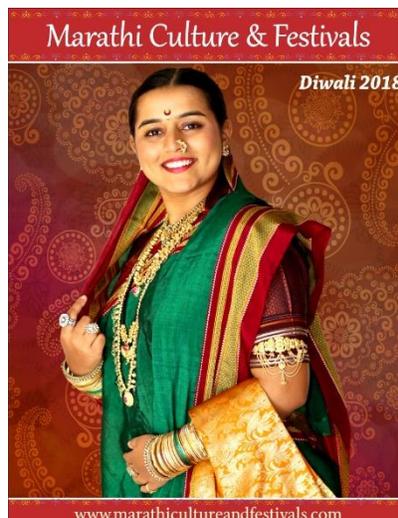
helped with this section. We featured youth on the cover and Ms. Deesha Malpure and Mr. Gandhar Katre from Los Angeles volunteered.

### Diwali 2017 cover and back pictures:



For the **2018** Diwali *ank*, we started a page on recognizing young Marathi people for their work out of the box to encourage others! Ms. Anushka Deshpande from LA volunteered for cover.

### Diwali Magazine 2018



It is so amazing to see people participating from remote places like Congo, Central Africa- by connecting the dots digitally. We invite each one of you to help by reading, sharing and even writing for our next Diwali Ank. Thanks to **BMM committee 2019** for giving me this opportunity to share this wonderful digital journey.

Aishwarya Kokatay

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