



BMM 2019 Convention in Dallas Texas:

Some Attendees Feedback and Thoughts for the Future:

It has been a couple of days since my return from the BMM convention in Dallas, but the sights, sounds and smells of the event still haunt me - sights of the wonderful dances of our pretty ladies clad in colorful traditional garb, sounds of the divine music of our youngsters as well as professionals like Devaki Pandit and the titillating smells of the daily spread of Maharashtrian delicacies. As an avid fan of Maharashtrian culture and of BMM, this is par for me. It happens every two years around this time.

The entire Dallas team, 450 strong, together with the BMM leadership did an outstanding job in conceptualizing, planning and organizing the event. Their two-year-long hard work was evident in every little detail of the program execution. And doing this on a voluntary basis while running families and managing careers is particularly remarkable. They all deserve our thanks and sincere appreciation.

Life is wonderful, but not perfect. However, all good things can be made better. In the spirit of continuous improvement, here are a few comments for your consideration as we go forward to Charlotte and beyond. I trust that my suggestions – this is neither advice nor criticism – will be taken in the spirit in which they are offered.

1. Thinking out of the Box – The opening ceremony was simply spectacular. No question about it. Indians, in general, are very religious people and we Maharashtrians are no exception. We love our deities and heroes. In this regard, there is no match for Ganapati and Shivaji. However, with our focus on them, most opening ceremonies are beginning to look alike. Without any disrespect, perhaps we could begin to wean away a little bit from them. Fortunately, there is no dearth of great heroes in Maharashtra like Tilak, Agarkar, Phule and Karve among others. And in all honesty, there is very little relevance to the Mawla or Koli culture to current times.
2. Dignitaries from India – The first and most important criterion for people imported from India as the Chief Guest or Keynote Speaker must be that they are well-known, dynamic speakers. Their scholarship, research, number of books written, or awards won are not as important as their ability to give an inspiring speech that is interesting, entertaining and informative. In this regard, only Dr. Aruna Dhere came through with flying colors.
3. VIP Culture – The first thing we need as Indians, is to totally banish the words and really the whole concept of VIP and Sir (attached after a person's name as in Joshi Sir). These words, remnants of the British culture, are just slavish. A Guest is a guest. A donor is a donor – maybe Gold, Silver and Bronze. A performer is a performer. We welcome them all. But they are not Very Important People as much as the rest of us are not Un-Important people. We now live in a country where our presidents are called simply Jimmy and Teddy and Bill and Dick. There is no need to constantly call somebody from India Sanmananiya XYZ Saheb Sir Ji, VIP whatever. They have a given name. That should be enough. These little things matter. They create a mindset. These people are not special creations of God. Let them mingle and talk with us, the masses. Let them stand in line, sit and eat with us. That will actually be rewarding for all.
4. Keep Politics out – Our guests, VIP or not, should be told ahead of time, in their agreements, that this is a purely cultural organization dedicated to the traditional Maharashtrian performing arts and the Marathi language. This is not a place for the promotion of any Indian political party or politician - be it BJP or Modi Sir, ShivSena of Thackeray Saheb, Congress or MadmaJi.
5. Sponsors – Sponsors are valuable for their financial support. But they also have a vested interest in promoting themselves. That can be and should be done tastefully and unobtrusively. Give them a booth. Allow them to put banners, distribute fliers and have private sessions for those interested in their products. But do not take all attendees for granted as captive audience for a long and boring video clip at the time of a main featured event at night when it is already running late. In any case, such promotion efforts are almost always counter-productive. Nobody listens and there is considerable booing and shouting.
6. Cost Control – Our community is affluent even by American standards and that is the good news. And yet there is need for and it is quite possible to control the ever-escalating cost of attending the BMM convention. The hotel, air fare and registration can easily set back a family of four by



three or four thousand dollars. I wonder if it is not possible to save on food as well as the number of performers and guests coming from India. The food was fantastic, but too much of it and possibly too much waste. Likewise, it has been proven time and again – we have enough high-quality talent in every area right here in North America. We can promote them, give more people the opportunity to perform and thus reduce the India component. Invite only the unique, exceptionally good speakers and performers. We need to sharpen our pencils on this.

7. Children – Children are beautiful, and we all love them. But a convention like this is definitely not a place for children under ten. We can indoctrinate them in the Indian culture, if that is the goal, at home. Nothing is more annoying than to hear somebody's darling little one “pasarav the bhokad” just when Dr. Aruna Dhere is giving a punch line of an important point and you miss it. As luck would have it, I was blessed with a family of four sitting in the row right behind me in the donor section – a mom, dad, a five-year-old and an eight year old. Nice family, bless their hearts. The five year old constantly kept on kicking the back of my chair. Even after two requests, the parents would do nothing because they were too busy giving a running commentary in Desi English to the eight-year-old translating for his benefit everything that was being said on the stage in Marathi!
8. Security and Safety – I think on both these counts the organizers might want to beef up a little bit. Our ladies often loaded with precious jewelry can be a target coming and going for the night programs especially if they have to walk to and from hotels that are not connected like the Omni was. On the safety issue – the stadium seating is wonderful, but if the stair-steps are high and if there are no hand rails to hold on to, it is a major hazard. Indeed, that was the case in the Dallas arena where I know of three ladies falling, one with a serious bone fracture. This is a liability for the organizers/ facility managers, and it can get complicated.
9. Vetting of Programs – Thanks to the incomparable reputation of Maharashtra's beloved Pu La, Batatyachi Chaal was the most anticipated program by the largest number of people. The assigned theater was inadequate. It should have been scheduled in the Arena. The fact that it turned out to be a dud is irrelevant. That is an issue of vetting by the program selectors. If you are doing something under the Pu La banner, the expectation and responsibility are very high.
10. Time management and parallel programs – Despite the best efforts of the Convention organizers, things can unexpectedly go wrong especially with issues of technology like audio – visual equipment. The outstanding effort of the Dallas team was marred by audio issues several times in the main auditoria. This has a snowball effect like in the airline industry. One program lapse affects subsequent programs, people switch and run around and that affects parallel programs and so on. While some of this is inevitable and understandable, we will do well to pay special attention to these possibilities and be prepared for ways of handling them.

Despite the things pointed out here, all in all it was a wonderful event with some very enjoyable programs.

Well-done BMM and well-done Dallas!

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The BMM organization is doing wonderful work in filling the cultural needs of the Maharashtrian community in North America. Its activities culminate every couple of years in the National Convention that has become a unique showcase of traditional Maharashtrian performing arts. And so it was in Dallas this year.

As we go forward, looking to Charlotte in 2021 and beyond, I have a few thoughts for your consideration. Indian immigrants have enjoyed the best of both worlds in terms of culture, disciplines and benefits. We have seen the graph of our success rising steadily and surely over the decades as the community continues to do well and prosper in this beautiful land of opportunity.



Now a few thoughts linger in the mind:

Why not do things - especially of the grand magnitude of the BMM convention - in more style, with more polish and Western sophistication and set an example for the generations ahead in India and in the USA?

Why not set simple and best norms like elegance, quality, punctuality, and design such a large cultural meeting with a solid theme, with specific goals and objectives?

Why not add panel discussions, symposiums and lectures by scholars to take it to next level beyond entertainment?

Why not felicitate artists who do good work in such a way that this award will gain the respect for being prestigious?

Just some ideas to think about.

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