

FIRST INDIA BAPTIST CHURCH

Asian Indian church celebrates first anniversary

By Greig Guthey
STAFF WRITER

Saturday night was an important night for Ray Charles. It was the night he and the members of his church celebrated their first anniversary. And they had been preparing for the event for weeks.

"We don't get to do this a lot of times. This is fun," the 10-year-old said. "I couldn't sleep yesterday night. Whenever I'm excited I can't sleep."

For the past month, Ray and the other 50 church members have been practicing musical instruments, rehearsing dance performances and working on the Lanner march in preparation for last weekend's celebration marking the one-year anniversary

"In America, there are many churches but when they hear about the Indian church they are automatically drawn here."

REV. AVINASH S. RAIBORDE
Pastor

ry of the First India Baptist Church.

The church is the second Asian Indian place of worship to open in DeKalb County in two years. The other, the Sikh Study Circle, opened in the spring of 1991 in Stone Mountain.

First India Baptist Church is a mission of Clairmont Hills Baptist

Church, 1995 Clairmont Road, just outside of Decatur. The Indian congregation meets evenings in space shared with the original congregation. Often, the two meet in combined services.

But they are separate churches. And that is the way the organizers of First India Baptist

Church want it.

"That's our goal, to have a church for the Asian Indian community," The Rev. Avinash S. Raiborde said. He pointed out that their services are conducted largely in Hindi, as well as other Indian languages. "When we have a singing time, we sing in many languages."

Members of the original congregation said they appreciate the influences brought on by the Indian congregation such as the use of the harmonium, a small reed organ, and the tabla drums.

"I thoroughly enjoy all the pagentry of it all," said David Woodruff. "They do worship different from us. It's nice to see them blend in their culture."

Please see CHURCH, 8 ▶



GREIG GUTHEY / Staff
Members of the First India Baptist practice a ceremonial candle dance in preparation for last weekend's celebration.

* Please turn over.

Church: Asian Indian congregation marks first year

► Continued from 1

Saturday night, the First India Baptist Church sang in a folk tradition from northern India called Qwali where two people playing the harmonium and tabla accompany a group of singers in a spiritual song. The two instruments also were part of the combined service on Sunday.

The Rev. Younis Farhad, who heads another Indian congregation in Marietta, said: "When you come back and speak in your own language or hear it, you know, it makes you feel more comfortable. For these people, this is good to hear the word of God in their own language and sing in their own language."

The idea for an Indian church grew out of an apparent demand for more Asian Indian worship services, after the success of a 1991 concert by Ernest Mall, an

India-born gospel singer who is from Philadelphia.

"We had three families, but with prayer we continued to grow, and as we continued to grow we needed a full-time pastor," Silas Masih said, looking back on the congregation's first year.

The Rev. Raiborde became that pastor. Between September and April, he had been commuting from Macon to conduct ser-

vices at First India Baptist. He was able to move to Atlanta with the help of Northwoods Baptist Church, which provides the Rev. Raiborde with a house rent-free.

The Rev. Raiborde said he expects the church to continue to grow because it provides an Indian-language service.

"They are very excited because they can worship God in our language," he said of his congregation. "In America, there are

many churches but when they hear about the Indian church they are automatically drawn here."

Lalita Patel said she likes the fact that the church unifies groups from all over India. "I'm from a different culture. They are from different cultures. But when we are in a group, everybody is brother and sister," she said.

(Debab Saha) The Atl. Journal/The Atl. Constitution

Sept. 24, 1992