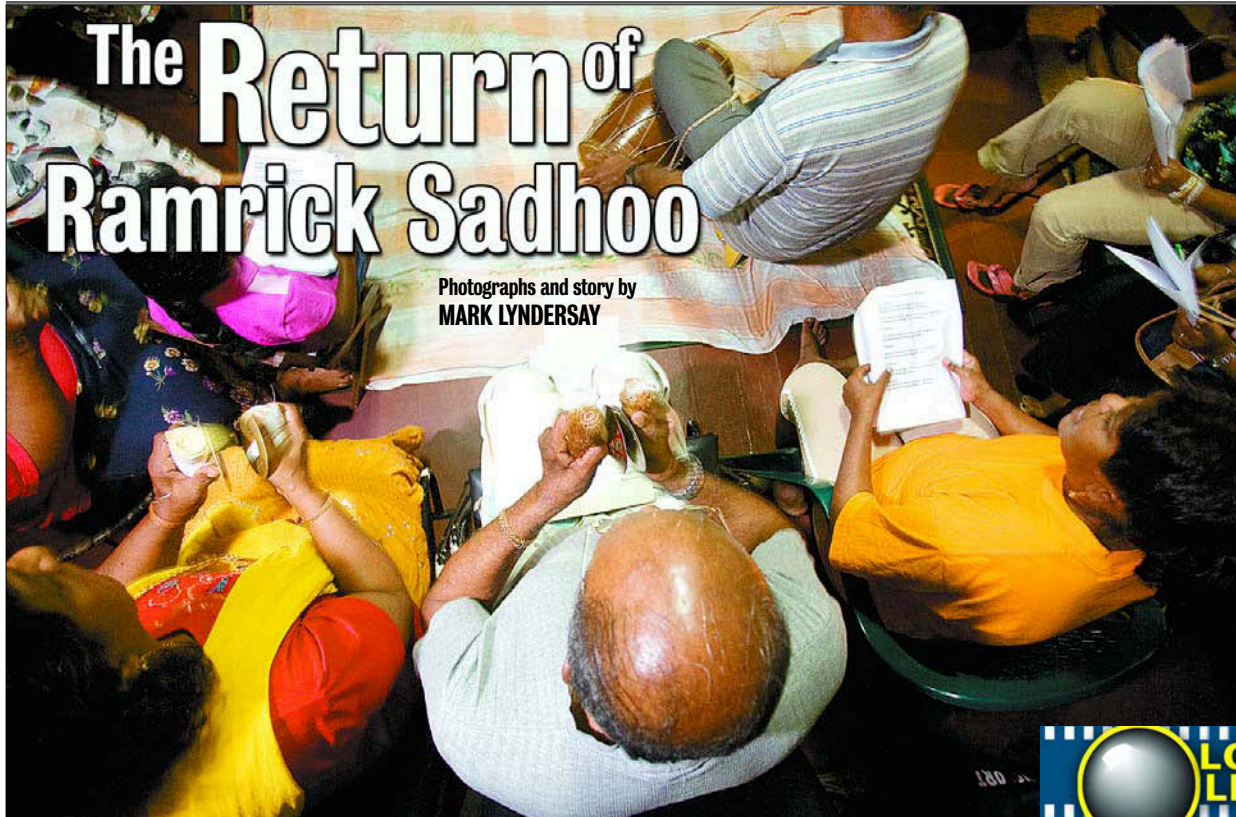


# The Return of Ramrick Sadhoo

Photographs and story by MARK LYNDERSAY



IN rehearsals at the home of RADHICA MARAJ, performers of the Ramrick Sadhoo Chowtal Group drill from printed lyric sheets.



Singing bhajans, the Ramrick Sadhoo Chowtal Group circles the fire as it consumes an effigy of Holika.



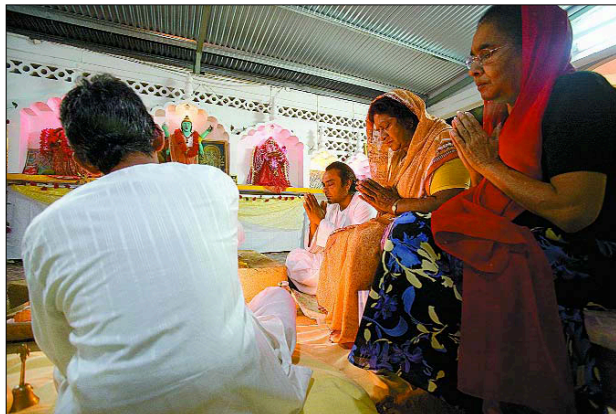
On Sunday morning, the group prepares before praying at the temple.



JAWANTEE MARAJ stirs a pot of abeer heated on a small earthen chula with members of the group.



ROMA MARAJ RAMDASS holds RESHMI RAMDASS as seamstress CHANDRA RAMGOOLAN fits her with the first of the headpieces she created for the group.



AT a puja held at the temple to mark Howan on the night of the full moon, PUNDIT SHARMA leads ROGER BALGOBIN, RENA RAMRICK-BALGOBIN and BASDAYE MAHARAJ in prayer.



Visiting the neighbourhood, RAMDAYE SEBASTIEN (second from right) dusts abeer on elder Mrs GOBIN.



SHAY DEV MAHABIR wanders the grounds at Felicity while the group gathers to go onstage.



The Ramrick Sadhoo Chowtal Group performing at Orangefield. That performance was carried live on radio.

## Amid abeer, love and purpose

IT'S dusk at Aranguez; the cool blues of the fading evening light burned away by the glare of sodium vapour stadium lighting. The group of chowtal singers huddled at the bottom of the steps leading to the stage are the last to perform, still showing streaks of white between the swaths of abeer splashed across their uniforms; it's the last performance for the newest group at this year's Holi celebrations.

But the Jogie Road Ramrick Sadhoo Mandir Chowtal Group was also one of the oldest groups to take the stage this year. Nobody can remember exactly when Ramrick Sadhoo formed his first chowtal group, not even his son Kenneth or daughter Rena, who revived the group this year after more than two decades of performing silence.

Kenneth remembers as far back as 58 years ago, his father as a commanding presence in the group, a drummer and singer who taught all the members of his group to sing in Hindi. Ramrick Sadhoo died in 1988, after turning the group over to a younger leader in 1975.

Eight days before this year's Phagwa celebrations, Rena Ramrick-Balgobin and Kenneth Ramrick agreed to revive the group and return to performance.

"When I was younger," Rena said, "Phagwa was never in venues. The women would remain at home to cook and prepare, and the men would go out to perform all day. Every night was a performance at a home or temple."

Five days before Phagwa celebrations begin, things are still a little shaky in rehearsals at the home of Radhica Maraj, the drumming unsure and the group of women stumbling over the

words, reading from printed sheets of lyrics. The words to the songs are in both English and Hindi.

"When you know what the songs are about, you will sing with more feeling," said Rena.

Ramrick Sadhoo's original group, according to Rena Ramrick, was made up of "old and older men," this new incarnation, 25 members strong, is overwhelmingly female, with members reaching down through three generations of a single family.

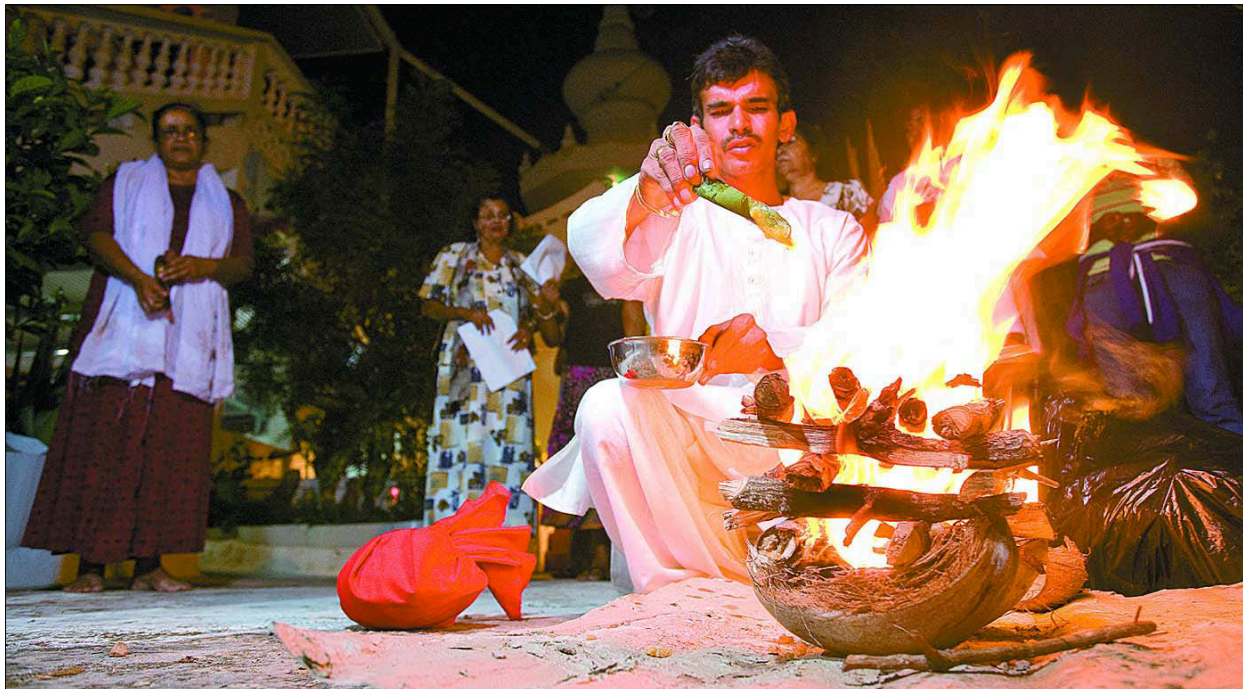
On Phagwa Sunday, the group assembles at the Ramrick Sadhoo Mandir to observe prayer rituals and then they walk through the neighbourhood, visiting people who helped to put the group on the road, as it were.

There's a quiet moment that summed up the spirit that took this group of women on their circuit of homes and Phagwa venues this Sunday, through drizzling rain and blazing sunshine.

At Curepe, a group of young Indian men had just taken to the stage with a performance full of enthusiasm, rumbling dholak drumming and a very unusual approach to reciting chowtal.

They were a group of Indian construction workers who lived nearby in the district. Lonely for their homeland, they had come to share in the celebration.

A small knot of women, led by Baby Persad from the Ramrick Sadhoo group stood before the stage, looking at the performance then walked up to the side of the stage and offered the men their jhaal. The crashing brilliance of the tiny cymbals slowly brought the rhythm into line, and the Friends from India completed their performance as the women of Ramrick Sadhoo clapped in rhythm, supporting their spirited effort.



PUNDIT PARMANAND SHARMA, whose grandfather, father and brother are among seven pundits in his family, prepares the fire for the symbolic burning of Holika.



After their final performance at Aranguez, closing the performances at the venue at dusk, members of the group laugh and play as they leave the venue.