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## Traditional dances performed during Miramonte's SSWANA Festival

By Emma Wong



Students Bela Patel and Kiran Nayyar perform at Miramonte's SSWANA Festival on April 14. Photo Emma Wong

dancer Kiran Nayyar said. "We learn so many different stories that we're continuing to pass down."

The festival celebrated SSWANA culture in Lamorinda and also spotlighted adversities that members of the group encounter. "We were proud to bring this festival to the campus," Maboudian said. "People were very respectful and made the event enjoyable. Respecting SSWANA culture and acknowledging the challenges we face can help people step into activism and advocacy."

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At Miramonte's Wellness Center, traditional Hindu dance group Kalanjali Dances of India performed a Bharatanatyam-style movement for the district's South Asian, Southwest Asian, and North African (SSWANA) Festival.

Organized by students Leila Maboudian, Selma Ahmed, and Nilab Ahmed, the festival was the first of its kind to celebrate SSWANA heritage within the Acalanes Union High School District. Booths included traditional candies and pastries, educational posters, language-writing activities, and the hand decoration art mehndi/henna.

Guided by instructor Kali Futnani, the dance was performed in South Indian Bharatanatyam-style. Traditional Indian dances were banned and nearly lost as a result of British colonialism in South Asia; however, efforts to revive them led to a successful resurgence. The act performed at the festival, called Devi Neeeye Thunai, centered on a narrative about Meenakshi, a Hindu warrior goddess.

Miramonte freshman Trisha Prabandham was one of the dancers. "It was a really fun experience, especially since we have another performance on April 30," Prabandham said.

"Dancing is a great way to learn more about my culture on deeper levels," Dublin High School freshman and