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COMMUNITY

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GEORGE JOSEPH

Though community activist Aney Paul won the Democratic Primary for the Clarkstown Town Council in Rockland County, Indian-origin candidates for the New York City Council fared poorly.

"Unless our community changes its attitude, no one from our community will ever win an election," said Swaranjit Singh, who contested the election to the New York City Council from District 23 in Queens, which has 12,000 South Asian voters. Singh got only 1,782 votes (21.73 percent.) The winner, Mark Weprin got 4,180 votes (50.96 percent). Another candidate Bob Friedrich received 2,240 votes.

"Our people will not vote for us. They cannot see another person coming up," Singh said, vowing not to contest another election.

Attorney Stanley Kalathara, who ran from District 25 in Queens, echoed similar sentiments, saying, "In District 25, there are about 3,000 South Asian votes. But most did not care to vote." Kalathara received only 730 votes (11.28 percent). The winner, Daniel Dromm, got 3,182 votes (49.16 percent); the incumbent Helen Sears got 2,561 votes (39.56 percent).

But Kalathara said he would not give up. He said he had contacted the campaign committee of William Thompson, the Democratic candidate who will challenge

'Our people will not vote for us'

Indian-American candidates fare badly in New York Democratic Primary



Aney Paul, center, celebrates her election victory with supporters

Mayor Mike Bloomberg in November, and plans to work for him.

"This is the first time I was running for an election. I learned a lot and met lots of people. Now I know things better," Kalathara said.

Singh said certain communities refused to support him.

"It is very difficult to win if one hopes to get the votes of their own people [and] they will not support you. We are very much divided," he said.

He said a Jewish candidate told him that the Indian community would not vote for him, though they might give money.

"The mainstream people also know our attitudes very well," Singh added. "One community gave a candidate \$15,000. What he did in return was to grant \$5,000 for a community event. The community was thrilled about getting the grant. But they forgot that it was only one-third of

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Ashok G Chandra wins Republican Primary

GEORGE JOSEPH

Attorney Ashok Gargeya Chandra created history by winning the Republican Primary for the New York City Council from District 4 with 66 percent of the votes cast.

He beat Neal D'Alessio, who was supported by the Manhattan Republican Party.

"We ran a wonderful and dynamic campaign," said Katie Manzi, a spokesperson for Chandra's campaign. "We used modern communication methods to run a grassroots movement. Youngsters came forward to support Chandra."

Chndra said he is very optimistic about winning the

general election November 3. "The Republicans held this seat 10 years ago. It is time that we regain it. I see much change around and in the attitudes of the people and it will reflect on election day," he said.

Job losses and the problems faced by small businesses are serious and people are looking for an alternative to the Democrats, he said.

A lifelong Republican, Chandra, 30, is vice president of the Young Republican Club, which is actively supporting him.

Chandra's father, an orthopedic surgeon, came to New York City from Bangalore in 1972. He married



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Ghazal queen returns to Kennedy Center

AZIZ HANIFFA

IN WASHINGTON, DC

Ghazal singer Vatsala Mehra returns to the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, September 27, a decade after she held a nearly 500-strong audience captive with a scintillating three-hour concert March 20, 1999.

Mehra, the only Indian *ghazal* singer to have performed at the prestigious venue, held her first solo concert there in 1992, which was also a house-full affair.

September 27 too, busloads of *ghazal* aficionados will arrive from New Jersey, Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Cleveland.

"Among the *ghazals* I will sing will be *Abhi To Mein Jawan Hoon* — an old time favorite — Ghalib, *Aj Jane Ki Zid Na Karo*, and some from my new album, which I am releasing on the same day of the performance," Mumbai-born Mehra said.

"I will be singing a *thumri* that was composed in [the last *nawab* of Awadh]

Wajid Ali Shah's *darbaar* [court] by Ustad Sadiq Ali Khan Saab, the creator of the *thumri* who was my guru's great, great grandfather," she said.

Mehra, who belongs to the Lucknow *gharana* [school of music], added: "I will also be singing Sufi songs, like *Jab Se Tune Mujhe Diwaana* and *Aafreen*."

McLean, Virginia-based Mehra migrated to the United States in 1974 to join her husband Jawaharlal 'Joe' Mehra, a transportation engineer. She has traveled to India every year since she came to America for periods of about two to three months to record and perform. She released her first album, *Guftagu*, in 1980, followed by *Shamakhana* in 1981, *Khazana* and *Khazana II* in 1982 and 1983, *Nigahen* in 1984, *Hasrat* in 1985, followed by *Nasheeli Peskkash* and two pop albums, *Ole Ole* and *Jhoom Jhoom*.

In 1992, Atlantic Video released *Nigahen*, making her the first Indian woman to have released a *ghazal* video. Since then her video releases have included *Shokian* in 1993, *Gubar* in 1996, *Meri Jaan* in 1999 and *Live at the Kennedy Center*, five years after her 1999

performance.

September 27, she will release her latest video, *Hasratein*.

After her first solo performance in 1992, *The Washington Post* music critic Don MacLean wrote: "Ever wondered how Joni Mitchell or Joan Baez might sound if she came from India? If so, you can find out by listening to *Nasheeli Peskkash*, Indian musicians who combine classical Indian sounds with Western folk and pop harmonies. The star of the show is Vatsala Mehra, a vocalist whose clear, pure voice sounds much like Mitchell's."

September 27, Mehra, who is in her fifties, will be accompanied by Manoj Kumar Bhati on the tabla, Akhlak Hussain Varsi on the harmonium, Sushant Sharma on the guitar and Bashir Khan on the banjo.

At Mehra's 1999 show, her *jugalbandi* [musical conversation] with Bhati had the audience in raptures. During the intermission of that show, then deputy chief of mission at the Indian embassy in Washington, T P Sreenivasan, presented her with a government of India award.

Her McLean-based Balaji Music Academy's annual concert is a popular event in the DC area.

Mehra, who started singing at age 8 and trained under Pandit Waslekar, Chotte Iqbal and Momin Khan, first performed in 1970 at Mumbai's Tejpal Hall. She has received numerous awards. She said her love for *ghazals* began as a child when "while all my friends would go to see movies and keep talking about the actors, I would spend my time listening to Mehdi Hasan, Begum Akhtar and Tom Jones. Yes, I used to love Tom Jones. So, with me it was always singing and music that were my great loves."



Vatsala Mehra