

In Kashmir, Diwali lits up communal harmony

Muslims,Sikhs Join Celebrations

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Srinagar, Oct 26: While Diwali was celebrated across the Valley with traditional enthusiasm and fervour, this festival of lights remained more of attraction in the heart of Srinagar as people from various communities including Muslims and Sikhs joined others to light up candles on footbridge across Kashmir's lifeline – River Jhelum.

As the sunset, a picturesque glow of communal harmony was visible on the footbridge as some 2000 candles were lit up by people present including Junior Minister for Home Nasir Sogami and Director Information Khawaja Renzushah while former City mayor Salman Ali Sagar was also present on the occasion.

Renzushah, a prominent writer as well, on the occasion said that communal harmony was nothing new for Kashmir but existed for ages.

“We owe a lot on this account to Awlia-e-Kiram like Khawaja Moin-ud-Din Chisti (RA) and Sheikh-ul-Alam (RA) who taught the people real meaning of communal harmony for the betterment of the society, universal peace and brotherhood” Renzushah said. Similar were the views of Salman Ali Sagar who said the event reminded him of his childhood when he would burst crackers with this Pandit companions in Shahr-e-Khaas. “There was never any disharmony between various religious communities. Only improper projection of the situation made outside world feel like this,” Sagar added during his informal chat with Greater Kashmir.

Dr Amit Wanchoo, a prominent Kashmiri Pandit socialite agreed with the comments of his Muslim counterparts saying: “One who had the will of staying back in Kashmir went on with the show.”

Wanchoo who had co-hosted the candlelight celebrations in collaboration with some other organizations including Kashmir Pandit Sanghrash Samiti, said the main reason of hosting the event on the footbridge was to convey the world that “there are no gaps between hearts of people.”

President of Kashmir Pandit Sanghrash Samiti Sanjay Tikoo said: “The new thing about this Diwali is that we are celebrating it on the streets and we have been supported by everyone.” Interestingly the event was co-hosted by Young Entrepreneurs Forum with its President Sheikh Imran and General Secretary Farooq Amin attending the event.

As the skies turned dark, the candles glow on the footbridge was more visible making passer-by curious about the development. Many of them were seen trooping on the bridge. An elderly man turned nostalgic of his childhood days. “Essence of Diwali is the same. But Dia has been replaced by candles.”

Meanwhile, the security forces deployed in the Valley also celebrated Diwali. They were seen bursting fire crackers and lighting up candles inside their camps and garrisons. According to Hindu mythology, Diwali is celebrated to mark the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya from his exile after vanquishing demon-king Raavan.

Governor NN Vohra and the First Lady Usha Vohra celebrated Diwali at Raj Bhawan in the heels of picturesque Zaberwan hills. Reports said staff of the Governor’s Secretariat and the security personnel there also joined the celebrations.

The Governor on the occasion, also prayed for peace and prosperity of the state.

KPs go for “open air” Diwali celebrations

Wednesday, 26 Oct 2011 at 10:51

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Srinagar, October 26:In order to build bridges of harmony between Pandit and Muslim community of valley, Kashmiri Pandits (KP) for the first time in valley’s history celebrated Diwali (festival of lights) in an “open air” on Foot Bridge near Lal Mandi here Wednesday. The event was organized by Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti and Space communications with the aim to depict the famous mutual brotherhood of Kashmiri’s. The celebrations were marked by the candle and diya lights dotted all over the Foot Bridge fencing.

A joyous Pandit family told Rising Kashmir that this celebration was a special moment for them. “It is after a long time we are celebrating the festival in open air without any fear and that too in our motherland amid our Muslim brothers.”

The gripping scenes at the festival were the warm gestures that young Kashmiri Muslims shared with their non-muslim brothers.

Sanjay Tikoo, president Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti told Rising Kashmir, “It is for the first time that Kashmir is celebrating this Diwali Milan, which means celebrating Diwali together. We want all people of Kashmir, from every religion to join in the celebration.” Former Srinagar, Mayor, Salman Sagar was also present on the occasion. He wished the people

of Kashmir a very prosperous Diwali and prayed for the lasting peace in Kashmir valley. The Kashmiri Pandits expressed their happiness over the way their Muslim brothers treated them on this festive occasion.

“I am really glad today. I have no words to express my happiness,” said Dileep, a policeman. For the young Kashmiri Pandits, who were celebrating the festival first time in valley, the “Diwali Milan” was a strange moment. But for their elders it was remembrance of the past.

SRINAGAR, Oct 26: With candles glowing on its both sides and fire crackers bursting in the middle, the swaying footbridge over Jhelum today looked a spectacle of reunion between members of various communities of Kashmir who came together to celebrate the festival of light, Diwali, after nearly 21 long years.

As the sun set on the west side of the calmly flowing river, Kashmiri Pandits, Sikhs and Muslims together lit the candles while the Muslim boys distributed sweets with a smile on their faces.

The celebrations continued for many hours.

“We celebrate Diwali every year, but this year it is different. For the first time we all have come together to celebrate the festival with such passion. It is great,” Ashok, a Pandit living in Rajbagh locality of the city said

Members of different communities participated in the celebrations. Some of them had brought their families including the children to enjoy the event. “It is after a long time that Diwali is being celebrated in Kashmir. I came here to be part of the get together and I brought the children along because they have never been to a Diwali celebration,” Muhammed Iqbal, a resident of Sonwar said.

Away from home, the non-locals working in Kashmir also took the opportunity to celebrate. “Nothing can replace home, but coming here and celebrating feels great,” Sharda, a domestic help working at Gogji Bagh, said while lighting the candles.

The evening, organized by the Pandit Sangharish Smiiti, also witnessed the presence of some known names like Amit Wanchoo, Sunjay Tikoo and Salman Sagar. The security measures were put in place to prevent any incident. The forces were guarding both ends of the bridge while a good number of them also patrolled the Bund and the nearby lanes till the event concluded.