Basant: A kite flying festival

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EVERY country has its different unique festivals and occasions. One such interesting festival, a festival of colours and fun are celebrated in almost all the Asian countries. This festival is popularly known as "Basant" or in simple words "Kite flying festival". Basant, sometimes called 'Jashan-e Baharaan' (*Spring Festival*) or 'Basant Panchami', is a festival celebrating the arrival of Spring. The Basant festival heralds the end of winter and the arrival of spring.

Although kite flying is also popular in other countries of the world, the Asian countries have the oldest history and experience of kite flying festival. Basant is a festival when people irrespective of their class, religion and age indulge in the merrymaking of flying kites. It is also celebrated by people of all religious backgrounds; Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians. It is held in spring- perhaps because spring generally brings a clear sky and just the right amount of wind. Spring heralds new beginnings and the colourful kites in the sky are a statement of this joyous awakening.



From mid-January to mid-February the clear blue skies over Dhaka in Bangladesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat in India, and Lahore in Pakistan, come alive with the gaiety and colour of paper kites in all hues, shapes and sizes.

Kite-flying festival, one of the traditional festivities in Old Dhaka dating back to the Mughal era, remains a huge crowd-puller in Bangladesh. The old town skyline goes ablaze with kites of all colors, sizes and shapes as the residents of Tantibazar, Shakharibazar and other Hindu localities celebrated 'Poush Sankranti', a festival that celebrates the migration of the sun from the tropic of Capricorn to the equator. The kite festival stands out as the cross cultural and religious blend that makes the people of old town so great.

Every year in Bangladesh different kite exhibitions and shows are held to encourage the tradition of kite flying in the country. Dhakabasi, a cultural organization, in cooperation with the Bangladesh Kite Federation have arranged the Asian kite show in 2007 at the National Museum auditorium where more than 100 kites of different kinds from Bangladesh, China, Japan, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand have been put on display at the exhibition with the purpose of exchanging the culture of kite flying in the Asian countries.

In Punjab, kite flying is a rooftop sport. The rooftops of inner cities turn into virtual arenas of kite flying competitions on Basant.

In Rajasthan and Gujarat kite flying gathers a frenzied momentum on January 13, also celebrated as 'Makar Sankrant' the day the sun changes direction and starts to move towards the northern hemisphere.

In Lahore it is a 24-hour spectacle. The city pioneered night kite flying using strong beams and white kites. Little wonders why Lahore is the official kite flying capital of Pakistan. It is where Basant is celebrated with unmatched passion and zeal. There is no official Basant day here-there is an entire Basant season of kite flying accompanied by rooftop dinners, dances and fun. The streets, parks and the roof tops especially are filled with cries and cheers of "Bo Kata" or Kite down, followed by drum rolls.

In Jodhpur, Maharaja Gaj Singh who is also the Chairman of Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation hosts "International Kite Festival" every year in the Umaid Bhavan palace lawns. About 75 fliers from 7 countries participate - with teams from Belgium, France, Hong Kong, U.K., Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Pakistan and about 7 teams from Jodhpur and Delhi, Pune, Jaipur. The theme of the kite festival is "One-Sky-One World". This is very relevant in this age of confrontation - a sky without borders. There are awards for the most creative kite, Indian and foreign, best flying display, technological innovation, beauty & delicacy of design.

Basant had its beginnings as a Hindu festival but now it has become a truly secular festival; the kites in the sky know no boundaries. Poets have penned romantic verses, and artists, both of the past and contemporary, have painted the Basant skies.

In today's world of war and division, if this joyous festival Basant can connect people of different countries, religion and colour, then every nation should welcome this festival with open heart. When the sky will be full of colorful kites, the human hearts will also fill up with love and respect for each other and people will try to forget their differences. May this colorful and joyous festival "Basant" shower love all over the world every year, every spring and every day in human lives.