



Diwali Celebration @ NYMU by Sandeep Chakraborty Institute of Biophotonic, NYMU

16th November, 2013! A day which will be remembered and cherished by all associated with the National Yang-Ming University community for a long time to come. On the very evening of that eventful day, NYMU witnessed for the first time *Diwali or the Festival of Lights*, a traditional Indian festival. Diwali has a pan Indian presence and is celebrated all over India. The NYMU Indian students' community organized the celebration under the mentoring of the Office of International Affairs (OIA), NYMU at the Students' activity center of the university. A series of activities including cultural introduction of Diwali, songs, dance, Indian food and fireworks marked the occasion and enthralled students of several countries who were present there.

India is a land of festivals. Many festivals are celebrated there with great pomp and show. Each festival has a religious or mythological significance behind it. *Deepawali* or in short Diwali is one such festivals of Hindus. The Sanskrit word Deepawali means "a row of lights". It is a symbol of victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance. It falls in the month of *Ashwin* of the Hindu calendar, which generally spans from mid October through mid November. It is a five day festival. People decorate their home and temples with earthen oil lamps and lights. There are also lots of fireworks displays. Every housewife purchases something new in the form of gold. Everybody wears new clothes on the occasion and younger ones seek blessings of the elders.

In return they get gifts and sweets from the elders. Friends and relatives visit each other's homes and exchange sweets and pleasantries. Thus, *The Times of India* correctly summed up the meaning of Diwali: "Regardless of the mythological explanation, what the festival of light really stands for today is a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and good will and a celebration of simple – and some not so simple- joys in life".

In Diwali celebrations all over India, *Rangoli* (a traditional folk art or drawing on the floor) is drawn in front of the entrance door to welcome Gods. Following that tradition, the Indian students of NYMU with the help of other students of different nationalities, designed a Rangoli using flower petals at the central hall. All the guests and students, from Taiwan and other countries, also light small *diyas* (earthen lamps) around the rangoli to symbolize the victory of light over darkness. On this occasion many girls also have their palms decorated with Mehendi or *Hena* (a traditional Indian way of decorating skin). A great enthusiasm was observed among the participants and created a festive atmosphere all around.



• Bollywood dance performance by Ms. Rea Chien



• A Taiwanese student playing the Indian national anthem by "Pipa"



• Auspicious opening of the celebration by Prof. Yen-Jen Sung (left)



• Winners of the lucky draw of the event



The symbolic beginning of the celebration was marked by lighting the ceremonial oil earthen lamps by Prof. Yen-Jen Sung, the Dean of the OIA, NYMU, who was the chief guest of the celebration. This was followed by chanting one Vedic verse (*Gayatri Mantra*) and a song (*Bhajan*) by the Indian students of National Yang Ming University to create an auspicious environment at the venue. The Dean, in his inaugural speech, emphasized the necessity of cross-cultural exchange in the NYMU community and asked the present audience to propagate

the novel message of Diwali and to make the world a better place to live in.

To further enrich the audience about Diwali, the Indian students showed a homemade video which underlines the mythological origin of the festival as well as how it helps to unite all the religions. Bollywood dance by a local group led by Ms. Rea Chien as well as the playing of Chinese musical instrument Pipa by Taiwanese students delighted everybody. All the attendants were also treated with



• Students from different countries enjoying the celebration



• Students distributing dinner boxes among the guests



• Students in Indian traditional attire decorating a banana tree with earthen lamps

delicious Indian curry and rice for dinner. After the dinner, the Indian students performed folk songs and recitation to add more flavor to the celebration. An innovative way of conducting a lucky draw also brought a great joy among everybody. The celebration was concluded by lighting firecrackers to the great excitement of children and old alike and also with a promise to have the Diwali celebration every year at NYMU. ■■■



• Fireworks on display to mark the Diwali celebration



• Curious little minds appreciating the "Rangoli"