

Navruz

Navruz is one of the well-known and oldest festivals of the Iranian-speaking nations. Its long historicity is evidenced by the fact that it has been integrated into cultures of Asia, Caucasus and the Middle East. Verbatim the word “Navruz” means a new day and it is celebrated on the first day of the Farvardin the first month of the Solar Hijri calendar and as such it is also called “New Year”. Navruz coincides with major natural events that are significant among the agriculturalist societies, such as start of the spring when the new agriculture season commences and it is also on the spring equinox – when the day and night reach the equal length.

Many ancient and medieval sources inform about the history and significance of the Navruz and modern scholarship also abound with academic publication on different aspects of this festival. Some sources where one can find direct illustrative information on Navruz are “Shahameh” by Firdawsi, “Navruznoma” by Khayam, “Osor-al boqiya” and “At-tafhim” by Biruni, “Zain al-akhbar” by Gardezi, “Al-mahosin val azdad” by Kistravi. According to this and other sources king Jamshed of the Peshadi dynasty has instituted the Navruz.

There are many rituals and customs that are hold prior to celebration of Navruz, such as “Gulgardoni” that takes place in one or two week before the Navruz. During this young children in groups will go to the fields and collect the first flowers of the spring such as winter aconite, crocus and netted iris and bring these to the village and towns. Afterwards they go from house to house singing merry songs to tell the household owners that the spring has arrived.

In the same timeframe i.e. one or two weeks before the Navruz people will start spring cleaning by putting their carpets and mattresses out and wash the household utensils and belonging. This is believed that a clean house signifies peace and prosperity in the coming New Year.

In the past there was also one tradition called “Chorshanbei okhiron” (the last Wednesday) this was celebrated in the last Wednesday

before the Navruz. During this ceremony a fire was lit in garden and community would gather and jump over it and saying: “take my yellow and withering color and give me your red and blooming color”. It was commonly believed that this ceremony helped them to purge their sins and they would start a new year with clean soul and spirit. Nowadays this ritual is observed only symbolically.

During the Navruz celebration Tajik people cook and prepare multiple types of food and beverages to decorate the Navruz table on the feast days. For example one of the central dishes is *sumanak*, which is prepared from the juice of sprouted wheat.

Another tradition of the Navruz festival is preparing a table containing seven dishes. In ancient Zoroastrian tradition holding such feast was to offer food sacrifices, however later this was transferred to be a celebratory feast where people would gather and eat those items prepared.

Among Tajik people there is tradition known as “haftmeva” (seven fruits) when during a festival people will put seven types of locally grown fruits to be shared. These were pomegranate, apple, pear, grapes, walnuts,









almonds and dried apricots. The types of the fruits were not arbitrary and could be changed by other types of the fruits, which the household could afford. From beverages the apricot compote was most popular as it is nutritious and healthy. In some parts of the Hisar and Zarafshan valleys people would prepare compote from seven types of dried fruits. In addition, many dishes in the Navruz season contain fresh herbs, spring vegetables and grains.

One other tradition that is observed during the Navruz with ancient history is reconciling those who were in tensed relationships. This carried huge symbolic weight as people believed that the New Year had to be started without hurt and sadness and reconciliation with those who hurt us was beneficial.

On the Navruz celebration day, which would last from seven to fourteen days many sport activities such as wrestling, running and other games among young adults and children are organized. The most popular game is perhaps wrestling, which is held in almost every county across the country.

Tajik folklore abounds with poetry dedicated to Navruz, which are than sung during the Navruz celebrations. The central theme of these songs and poems is about the beauty of the spring contrasted by the coldness of the winter and how Navruz resurrects the sleeping nature after the winter and brings light and brightness in the nature and people's lives.

Navruz is a connecting bridge between the current generation with the rich tangible and intangible history and culture of their ancestors. It is perceived to be an international and global event bringing together people of different ethnic and language groups together both in Tajikistan and elsewhere.

Navruz today is an international festival and since 23 of February 2010 it was included into the UN's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and each year now the 21st of March is celebrated as an International Day of Navruz.

Navruz is also included into UNESCO's Representative List of intangible cultural heritage.



