

V. Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

1. Item: Navruz, Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz, or Nevruz

Navruz was inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Multi-national nomination by Azerbaijan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan

Nowrouz is the name of Iranian New Year. It is a tradition which is more than 3000 years old and is believed to have been invented by Zoroaster himself. Since then it is being celebrated starting from the date of 21st March of every year in all types of communities all across the globe that have reverence for this day of the astronomical Vernal Equinox. The celebrations of this special tradition prolong for different number of days in different communities.

In Pakistan it is celebrated as a "socio-cultural" festival in the Southwest and Northern areas of the country i.e. in Gilgat Baltistan, Chitral and Baluchistan. It marks the New Year and the beginning of spring. Though, it is celebrated by many religious and ethnic communities but mostly by Shias, Hazaras, Ismailis, and Bahai's in Pakistan. It is celebrated by all members of the community (children, women, elderly people and youth) equally like a Jashan (festival). Likewise the communities who celebrate it do not have some unique characteristics as one comes across all types of socio-economic classes living different ranges of ways of living practicing Nowrouz. The total size of population who celebrates Nowrouz as a routine annual festivity is 50-60,000 according to a rough estimate. It has deep religious and socio-

cultural significance for all these communities and is associated with numerous traditional tales and legends.

The major events and features of the tradition in Pakistan today are socio-cultural and religious gatherings, folk games like egg striking (in this game eggs are dipped in vinegar all along the night and then are used for this game. In this game people strike eggs with each other and the one who succeeds in breaking the other's egg wins the game), Polo matches, folk dances, festivals and carnivals, special cuisines including the eggs painted in seven colors, and a number of rites underlining humanitarianism and ethics. Traditional and festive clothes are put on and friends, relatives and neighbors are visited and served with special cuisines. Special prayers are also organized for the peace and prosperity for all along the year. Presence of eggs in the celebrations of Nowrouz similarizes it with Easter and some of other festivities in which eggs has special significance. Though no direct socio-cultural or religious significance is reported of the eggs with respect to the celebrations of Nowrouz but it does signify the commonality with other cross cultural celebrations like Easter.

As said earlier that Nowrouz is a 3000 years old tradition but the history witnesses that it grew and evolved with every passing year. This tradition is transmitted to every coming generation unbrokenly in the communities where it is revered and celebrated. No major risk or threat to the viability and sustainability of this tradition has been reported or observed. However President of GECA (Gojal Educational and Cultural Association) has reported that in his childhood (in late 1970s in the area of Gilgit) he witnessed few of Islamist extremist elements speaking against the celebrations of Nowrouz with the logic that it has no Islamic significance. But these sermons could not affect the frequency of celebrations of Nowrouz. This tradition has gone deep down in the routines of the said communities that the question of the strength of mode of transmission looks odd. Rather after its coverage by print and electronic media its popularity has also increased with general masses.

Inscription of the element has contributed highly in spotlighting the visibility of this festive tradition at every level but specially at national and international level. Before this it was only celebrated in the specific geographic areas as mentioned above. However, from 2009 onwards special events are being organized at national and international level. For example at national level only in Lok Virsa two highly significant events were organized one on 25th , 26th March 2012 in collaboration with Islamic Republic of Iran and second on 27th , 28th March 2012 in collaboration with Gojal Educational and Cultural Association. Likewise it also has been reported that special festivals were also organized at National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad and Quaid-i-Azam university, Islamabad in 2012.

Likewise, at international level four Presidents gathered together (including the President of Pakistan Mr Asif Ali Zardari) specially and exclusively at Tajikistan for the celebrations of Nowrouz in 2012. In the same course an International Seminar of Nevruz Studies was arranged at Ankara, Turkey on 30 March, 2012.

The celebrations and appreciation of the said tradition at multiple levels is also helping in highlighting the commonalities between various ethnic and religious communities this process could thereby help initiate the process of inter-cultural harmony among civilizations and promote the respect for cultural diversity. For example it has been learnt and noticed that Jewish festival of Purim is probably adopted from Persian New Year. Then it also has been noticed that egg has special role in Nowrouz celebrations and has got very central role in the Christian celebrations of Ester too.

This tradition has been included in the annual calendar of activities of several cultural and academic institutions and is being observed as a routine activity.

Gojal Educational and Cultural Association is a non governmental organization based in Gilgat Baltistan (for details about GECA please visit www.geca.org.pk) playing the special and central role for the safeguarding of the said element. This organization is composed of the very members of the

community who celebrate the tradition since centuries. In this associational form they are helping to promote and project it at national and international level with full vigour and enthusiasm.

However, as far as the participation of communities is concerned at their local level for the safeguarding of the said element it is beyond any doubt and is self evident. It is part and parcel of their very cultures.