

Nowruz in Tajikistan

Tajikistan's biggest annual celebration is the spring festival of Nowruz, which marks the beginning of the Persian New Year and starts at the spring equinox. For the Tajiks, Nowruz represents a festival of friendship and renewal of all living beings.

Persian-speaking Tajiks, celebrate Nowruz as a national holiday. Despite the fact that during the former Soviet Union, the Russians had banned the holding of national traditions, including Nowruz, with the aim of cultural unification in the republics, the Muslim people of Tajikistan did not give up their national and religious traditions. Tajikistan, one of the three Persian-speaking countries in the world, celebrates Nowruz with great grandeur.

Nowruz is recognized as a symbol of national identity and national culture in Tajikistan. The Tajik people refer to Nowruz as a symbol of friendship and the resurrection

of all beings. These days, relatives and elders are visited. They go to the tombs and recite the Holy Quran and offer prayers. Some of the customs by the Tajik people include:

Khonaburoon (Cleaning the house). One or two weeks before the Nowruz women and their daughters sweep and clean the entire house, spray the perfumes, wash the curtains and mattress' etc. They also clean the kitchens and yards, wash the teapots, bowls, plates, and kettles. Before the Nowruz, everything must be clean as new. A new year is coming and the house must be symbolically purified.

Charshanbe Suri (lit. "Festive Wednesday"). Like the people of Iran, the Tajiks, too, observe the custom of Charshanbe Suri by jumping over bonfires and engaging in fireworks.

Gulgardoni (bringing new flowers). One of the first customs of the Nowruz performed by children and adults is Gulgardoni. This custom is also called as Boychechak (Snowdrop) in Khujand, Sayri guli lola (Tulip Festival) in Isfara, Idi guli surkh (Red rose festival) in Istaravshan, Panjakent, Guli Siyohgush, or Seyovush (the flower of Seyavosh or flower with black ears) in the southern districts of Tajikistan. In this ceremony of informing the arrival of spring groups of children and adult go the hills and pick some flowers like snowdrops, irises, tulips and pass the houses of the inhabitants of the rural village and sing the special congratulatory songs.

Ashtikonoun (reconciliation) is another custom, which is carried out as part of the Nowruz traditions. Before the eve of Nowruz people should forgive the offense made by others, or in other words, nobody



should be injured or offended at the time of the arrival of the new year. Usually, old people play a great role in carrying out this custom and through their mediation, the younger generation forgives each other if they had some sort of bad feelings about their friends and relatives.

Buzkashi (literally “goat pulling”). The Buzkashi contest is another inseparable part of Nowruz celebrations in Tajikistan. The carcass of a goat is placed in the middle of the playground and from the speaker installed on the container located on the other side of the playground the amount of the prize and the name of the donor who has paid for the prize for that particular round are announced. Some participate and those who do not like the prize of a particular round keep cantering around the playground waiting for the next round to start.

The most widespread Nowruz contest is considered Gushtin (wrestling), which takes place in every village, towns, district centers, and cities and the winners are rewarded with different prizes such as carpet, television, video-player, tape-re-

corder, refrigerator, and car and also traditionally prizes like a bull, horse and sometimes camel from the organizers and local governments.

Like the Iranians, the Tajik people, too, set up the “Haft Sin” table, which is called “Dastarkhan”. Unlike the Iranians, they take the Nowruz celebration to the streets so that everyone could participate in it. In fact, Nowruz in Tajikistan is not just about houses but encompasses the whole city.

Traditional Nowruz dishes are prepared with different grains and herbs symbolizing the fruitful nature and healthy food. In the Hisar district, women cook gandumkucha, the ingredients of which are ground wheat, beans, peas, sorrel, onion, mint, salt, and water. In other regions of Tajikistan, this dish is called dalda (Kulab, Yavan), baj (Bakhshan), gouja (Panjakent).

Sumanak is the most widespread and traditional Nowruz delicacy in Tajikistan; a sweet pudding made from germinated wheat, symbolizing affluence. Two weeks before the celebration women grow wheat sprouts and on the eve of the Nowruz bring their germinated wheat sprouts to

the eidgah - celebration yard - where they cook sumanak in a big pot. Since the preparation of sumanak is a hard work that is difficult for one person to do and should be regularly stirred for 15 to 20 hours, women get together and join hands in preparing sumanak and playing musical instrument daf and dafcha (a type of tambourine) and singing folk songs. There are also many rubais (quatrains) and folk songs dedicated to Nowruz in the Tajik folklore which usually are performed at the beginning of spring and during the Nowruz festival days.

According to Dr. Dilshod Rahimov of the Research Institute of Culture and Information of Tajikistan, Nowruz is a means and a cause for gathering, communicating, enjoyment, getting delighted, remembering the ancestors, and expressing close connection and attachment to nature. Moreover, through participating in social gatherings people get to feel and have the sense of being members of society. Nowruz is the festival without borders that belongs to people of different ethnical backgrounds, languages, religions, gender, ages, and social status.

