



# Nowruz at a Glance

By: Mohaddaseh Asadi Movahed

Nowruz, which in the Persian language literally means ‘new day’, is the Iranian New Year coinciding with the first day of spring, and is nowadays celebrated in many countries of the world and by various ethnolinguistic groups usually on or around March 21 on the Gregorian calendar.

Nowruz’s timing in Iran is based on the Solar Hijri algorithmic calendar, which is based on precise astronomical observations, and moreover use of sophisticated intercalation system, which makes it more accurate

than its European counterpart, the Gregorian calendar.

While Nowruz has been celebrated since the reform of the Iranian Calendar in the 11th century CE to mark the new year, the United Nations officially recognized the “International Day of Nowruz” with the adoption of UN resolution 64/253 in 2010.

It is important to know that Nowruz is not, in essence, religious and has cultural and historical origins. Nowruz is the first day of

spring, the day on which everything in nature is reborn. It is a metaphor for people to wake up again and try their best to be a better version of who they were in the year that has passed. In a sense, it is a new opportunity for everyone to learn from nature and grow into a better individual.

As every important festivity has its special symbol, Nowruz’s symbol is called “Haft Sin”, “haft” means seven, and “sin” refers to the sound “s” in the English language. It is a table beautifully designed and comprises seven things starting with the letter “sin” in the Persian language. Each item has its own specific and special meaning. Besides these seven items, there are other things that might be added to the table in order to make the set more beautiful and complete. But the seven items are inseparable and the main components of the Nowruz table.

“Sonbol” or lavender, is one of the seven elements. The flowering period of this plant is at the beginning of spring and for this reason, it is placed on the “Haft Sin” table as a symbol of spring. It means that spring has come and we hope that we will also become as fresh and beautiful as spring inside and outside our souls.

“Sabze”, is grown from the sprouts of wheat, barley, lentils, and more. It is known to be the symbol of cheerfulness and freshness. And it is believed to fade away gloominess, darkness, and sadness from their lives. Sonbol and sabze can be used interchangeably.

“Sib” which means apple is the symbol of health and beauty. As there is a saying that “an apple a day keeps the doctor away”. We can say that Iranians knew about the mira-

cles of a simple apple long before the doctors found out about it.

“Senjed” which is *Elaeagnus* fruit is the symbol of thinking straight. Iranian’s place this fruit so that everything in the new year will be done with thought and reason. The overall meaning of this symbol is the tendency to reason.

“Sir” or garlic is a component of the “Haft Sin” about the meaning of which - and what it symbolizes - there are different opinions. However, the common of these views is that garlic had a protective role against evil and now it is used as the symbol of protector against sickness because it has antiseptic quality.

“Serke” or vinegar is the symbol of adversity, satisfaction, and submission. Since life is filled with hardship, and improving it requires hard work, it is important to gain the habit of accepting what comes around and know how to overcome them. In other words, it is to have a submission.

“Somagh” or sumac is the last of the seven “sins”. It is the symbol of patience. There are a few Persian proverbs in which the word sumac is used and the overall connotations of which have something to do with patience, tolerance, and endurance.

Nowruz and the new year celebrations are worth pages of articles. And this was a mere introduction into the unique and unimaginable culture of Iran with all its colors and beauty. The purpose of the author behind the contribution of this paper was that it would be a pity if Iran and its diversified cultures and communities remain unknown and undiscovered.

There are some other customs associated with Nowruz the most im-



portant of which include:

#### **Charshanbe Suri**

Charshanbe Suri (lit. “Festive Wednesday”) is a prelude to the New Year. It is celebrated on the eve of the last Wednesday before Nowruz. It is usually celebrated in the evening by performing rituals such as jumping over bonfires and lighting off firecrackers and fireworks.

Iranians sing the poetic line “zardi ye man az to, sorkhi ye to az man” (lit. my yellow is yours, your red is mine), which means my weakness to you and your strength to me, to the fire during the festival. This symbolizes the wish that ill-health and problems would be away from their life and are instead replaced them with warmth, health, and energy.

#### **“Qashoq Zani”**

(lit. Spoon banging) is a tradition observed on the evening of Charshanbe Suri, similar to the Hal-

loween custom of trick-or-treating. In Iran, people wear disguises and go door-to-door banging spoons against plates or bowls, and receive packaged snacks.

#### **Sizdah Bedar**

In Iran, the Nowruz celebrations last for thirteen days. On the thirteenth day of the New Year, Iranians leave their houses to enjoy nature and picnic outdoors, as part of the “Sizdah Bedar” ceremony. The greenery (sprouts of wheat, barley, lentils) grown for the “Haft Sin” setting is thrown away, particularly into running water. It is also customary for young single people, especially young girls, to tie the leaves of the greenery before discarding it, expressing a wish to find a partner and be married in the current year. Another custom associated with Sizdah Bedar is the playing of jokes and pranks, similar to April Fools’ Day.