



From India's Holi to Iran's Nowruz 1

Spring festivals symbolize the persistence or rebirth of beliefs. The conjunction of the vernal equinox and spring full moon brings celebrations across the Northern hemisphere.

It's the beginning of spring or the tail end of it, depending on where you are in the Northern hemisphere. The vernal equinox this year arrives on a full moon night, merging lunar and solar celebrations of spring. The equinox, or "Shunbun No Hi" is a national holiday in Japan. It used to be a Shinto celebration but was secularized after the war. The Japanese spend it honoring their ances-

tors and cleaning homes.

Iranians do something similar as part of their Nowruz festivities. Some say the phrase "spring cleaning" originates from the Iranian "khooneh takouni" (literally "shaking the house").

Indians, mainly Hindus, gather around fires under the spring full moon to celebrate the arrival of spring and the celebration continues the next morning by smearing color on friends and even strangers. There's a legend associated with the bonfire, about Prahlad, Hiranyakashapu, and Holika, but it feels like a myth tacked on to explain an

extant ritual. Very few Indians are even aware of the story of Holika. If Holi is, indeed, a pre-Hindu rite that has gradually become part of the mainstream, it is one of the greatest testaments to Hinduism's absorptive capacity. I can't think of another culture that shares anything like India's prudishness and yet celebrates a festival in which traditional constraints are discarded to the extent they are during Holi. It will be a double festivity this year as the Indians will celebrate Holi, the festival of colors, and Nowruz on the same day. This year, Holi is coinciding with Nowruz, further



cementing the 'Ganga-Jamuni' tehzeeb of Lucknow.

The procession, which was started by Lalji Tandon and Amrit Lal Nagar, starts from Koneshwar Mandir and passes through Muslim-dominated areas where it is welcomed by the sprinkling of 'itar' (perfume) and petal showers. "The procession is a celebration of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood and strengthens the bond. This year, Nowruz is coinciding with Holi so we will be celebrating both," said Deepu Khatri, member of Holiika Utsav Samiti, which organizes the procession.

"Just like Holi, we celebrate Nowruz

with colors and all things new, since it is our new year. The Holi procession passes through our area and many of us and our kids join it," said Afroz Naqvi, a resident of Chowk. Riddhi Gaur of Shubh Sanskar Samiti, Chowk, said that they will be stressing the importance of voting in Holi celebrations this year.

The festivals of Holi and Nowruz are rather celebrated simultaneously across Jammu and Kashmir with fervor and gaiety. Nowruz marks the onset of spring and is celebrated in different ways in different parts of the world.

People in Kashmir usually undertake plantation on this day and they expect light to moderate rains to take place on the festive occasion.

The traditional Nowruz dish in Kashmir is 'nadur' (lotus stem) and fish, apart from dried turnip cooked with chicken and on the day of Nowruz, people traditionally prefer to go for leech therapy for the treatment of various ailments.

Celebrated almost across Central Asia, Nowruz is part of Kashmir's culture. According to historians, with the coming of spiritual personalities like Shah-i Hamdan, Bulbul Shah, Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, and others, Kashmir came to be known as the Persia of the East (Iran-e Saghheer) that had very close links with Central Asia and the Middle East through the traditional Silk Route.

"As Kashmir came under the influence of cultural, economic, and industrial growth of the Central Asian region, people adopted many customs and new traditions which are now deeply rooted in generations. These include the celebration of Nowruz as well," said a historian. Meanwhile, the festival of colors, Holi, is also celebrated with traditional fervor and gaiety across Jammu and Kashmir. Members of the Hindu community celebrate the festival by splashing colors on their

family and friends. Muslims also visit the Hindu neighbors and greet them. They also exchange and distribute sweets.

Shopkeepers in Maharaja Bazaar in Srinagar - famous for selling festival celebration products - generally announce rebates on the products that are mostly used on the occasion. Many tourists also celebrate Holi in Kashmir. The celebrations are



also held at the famous Mughal Gardens in Srinagar, with tourists enjoying music amid beautiful scenes of the Dal Lake.

In Jammu, various political and social organizations and several educational institutions celebrate the festival with gaiety.

The markets in the winter capital also wear a festive look, while temples and residential houses are decorated with floral bunting.

1. Contributed by some Indian writers this article was received from the Office of the Cultural Counselor of the Islamic Republic of Iran in New Delhi.