



Nowruz in Afghanistan

Nowruz festivity has had a long history in Afghanistan and it has been celebrated in this country for thousands of years. Unfortunately, however, there are no reliable and authentic documents available about the time and manner of the genesis of Nowruz

in Afghanistan, even though some research scholars believe that its life is the same as the history of the Aryan tribes.

Preparations for Nowruz traditionally start after Chaharshanbe Suri (the last Wednesday before the



New Year) and the following day is Farmer’s Day, which is marked across the country with ceremonies and displays of agricultural products and livestock. A large, multi-day exhibition is held in Badam Bagh, Kabul each year, at which new ideas and practices, as well as products, are traded between farmers.

The festival of Gul-i-Surkh (red rose) is the principal festival for Nowruz. It is celebrated in Mazar-i-Sharif during the first 40 days of the year when red tulips grow in the green plains and over the hills surrounding the city. People from all over the country travel to Mazar-i-Sharif to attend the Nowruz festivals. Stamping on green sprouts sprouts of wheat, barley, lentils, is a part of this custom. The other ceremonies that form parts of Nowruz programs in Afghanistan include:

Jahandeh Bala (raising the flag or banner) or Jahandeh Ziyart Sakhi, which is a magnificent ceremony, is celebrated on the first day of the New Year in Imam Ali’s pilgrimage places in Mazar Sharif and Kabul and hundreds of thousands of people from different parts of Afghanistan Participate in it. In this ceremony, a flag attributed to Imam Ali (as) is raised in the morning of that day and Nowruz officially begins. It is attended by high-ranking government officials such as the Vice-President, Ministers, and Provincial Governors and is the biggest recorded Nowruz gathering,

with up to 200,000 people from all over Afghanistan attending.

Jashn-e Dehqan or National Farmer’s Day is held on the first day of every solar year when the sun returns to the same position in the seasons’ cycle and hundreds of farmers have the opportunity to display their products and equipment and trade them with one another. They also exchange innovative ideas among themselves.

Buzkashi (literally “goat pulling”) in which horse-mounted players attempt to place a goat or calf carcass in a goal. During the first two weeks of the New Year, the citizens of Kabul hold family picnics in Istalif, Charikar, and other green places where redbuds grow.

To light a fire, to break a jug to stay away from bad omens, to burn espond (peganum), to go to the plains, to make knots on sabze (greens wheat sprouts) by girls of marriage age, to give cash gifts to children, to throw sabze in water, to cook fish, etc. are also some of the customs which are observed in some provinces.

As regards special Nowruz foods, it should be said that people in Afghanistan cook special local foods for Nowruz days, especially on New Year’s Eve, the most outstanding of which is vegetable rice. The bakeries, too, bake a type of cookie, which is called “Kol-



ouche Nowruzi” and is only baked in Nowruz.

A few days before Nowruz Afghan women try to create cleanliness and vitality at home and prepare to welcome spring by washing their carpets and dusting their houses. Decorating and painting the house to welcome spring is another Afghan tradition in the last days of winter, and Afghan men try to renovate their furniture before the arrival of Nowruz.

On the eve of Nowruz Afghan women also cook Samanou or Samanak, which is one of the old traditions of Nowruz in Afghanistan. They sit by the fire from the beginning of Nowruz eve and engage in cooking this traditional delicacy up to dawn and recite old poems, narrate stories, and rejoice until Samanak is fully prepared.

Haft Miveh (seven fruits) is a special delicacy made from seven types of dried fruits such as almonds, walnuts, pistachios, raisins, apricots, senjed or jujube, and qaysi (prunes), the preparation of which is customary in Nowruz in Afghanistan and with which guests are welcomed.

Although today some people consider celebrating Nowruz as heresy and contrary to the commands of Islam and attribute it to Zoroastrians and fire worshippers, what is certain is that celebrating this day as the day of the revival of nature and the arrival of spring are in no way un-Islam in essence.



Cultural experts also say that in addition to having been rooted in the history of Afghanistan for a very long time, Nowruz is the beginning of spring and the revival of nature and should be celebrated. According to them, Nowruz festivity in Afghanistan does not merely include customary convention, games, and traditional entertainments, but also has a special place in religious teachings and has special religious customs and practices.

The most famous and famous deeds of this day are the prayer for the advent of the new year, which is performed individually or collectively, and at the same time as the revival of nature, Muslims pray and request God Almighty to make profound changes in their lifestyles in various fields.

According to Dr. Mohammad Nasir who is an Afghan scholar in Kabul, Nowruz is considered a national and cultural value in Afghanistan and Afghan people welcome this day in different ways.

It is noteworthy that following the advent of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan Nowruz has been held and celebrated in accordance with Islamic religious beliefs. On this day, in addition to performing various ceremonies and fun and joy, the people of Afghanistan worship God Almighty and pray and visit the graves of their ancestors and deceased ones and pray for them in an Islamic way.