

The Red Wednesday, a fire-connected festivity!

By Tourism Industry Association of Iran

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From among the Aryan festivals and feasts, some of the most important ones pertained to fire, the symbol of good health, cultivation, light, and purity to the Iranian. Chaharshanbe-Suri, "The Red Wednesday", counts among the only two extant one of those fire-connected festivities

It is an annual ritual which is held on the eve of the last Wednesday of the Iranian year. It is believed that the ritual guarantees the dissipation of the misfortunes and evils, and of course, the materialization of people's hopes and desires for the next year.

It dates back to before the Arab Conquest of Iran; when the Iranian year was made up of 360 days with 5 extra days during which the Zoroastrians would build fires to invite their ancestors' ghosts to their homes. On the other hand, we know that the Arabs believed that Wednesday was inauspicious. So, the people shifted their ritual to the eve of Tuesday (in the Arabian calendar, a day begins and finishes at dusk) to save the custom against the ill will of the Arabs. The ritual is composed of different rites:

Bute-Afruzi (Bush-igniting)

Bush-igniting is the principal ceremony of the night. Before the dusk, seven, as a symbol for the seven Zoroastrian angels (Amshaaspandan), heaps of bushes (of weed) are gathered before the house-gate or on the roof of the house -some visible place for the "ghosts" to guide. After the night has fallen on, the heaps are kindled and the uproarious tumult begins.

Everybody, ranging from the old to the children and the women, is excited into a passionate, memorable night. Now it is time for everybody to leap over the bonfires. They dance and sing merry notes. The traditional song of the night is: "Sorkhi-e man az to/ Zardi-e to az man", literally "my redness from you/ your yellowness from me", but figuratively it means "Give me your fiery red color and take back my wintry sallowness".

Nowadays, firecrackers and other types of fireworks and explosives are inextricable elements of the night, adding more commotion and disorder to the atmosphere and sometimes changing the locality into a battleground, so that you can easily imagine the people as warriors serving at the front. This night is one of the most diligent occasions in the year for the riot police.

In small cities and villages, the ash of the blaze traditionally is cast off in a stream or some crossroad, due its ill omens, because people have thrown off their former pain and misfortunes into it (of course, in the northern parts of Iran, such as Gilan province, people put this ash at the foot of the trees as fertilizer). The girl or woman, who had assumed the errand, on returning is asked for her identity and she would say, in response, that she is getting back from a wedding ceremony, fetching good health and good luck with her.

Qaashoq-Zani (Spoon-hitting)

Very much like Halloween and in full disguise, usually a veil (chador) covering the entire body, longing youths go to seven different houses and make a noise by hitting a bowl with a spoon to signal the household residing in the house. Being presented, by the household, with some treat betokens a positive omen, and vice versa.

Faal-e-Gusheneshini (solitary telling of the fortune)

Young women longing for a spouse make a wish, then having hidden themselves in some invisible dark corner of a passage, listen to the passers-by's talks, according to which they decide whether their wish will or will not be fulfilled; passers-by's positive talk signifies good omens, and unpleasant words point to some ill portent.

Kuze-Shekani (earthenware jar-shattering)

The household put some coal, as the sign of ill omen, and some salt, standing for evil eye, plus a cheap coin, signifying poverty, inside an earthenware jar. They turn the earthenware jar around their heads one by one. Then, one of them throws the jar over the roof onto the alley. Thus, ill omen, evil eye and poverty are driven out of the house.

Gereh-Goshaee

Similarly, women yearning to tie the knot or persons who have run into some problem, make a knot at the corner of a handkerchief or some other garment and request the first person whom they come across to undo it. The person's willingness will signal a hopeful portent.

Shaal-Andazi (shawl-dropping)

In some parts of the country, young boys, who are engaged, drop a shawl or wraparound down from the roof of their fiancée's house and she would present him with some confection or other present. Along with these rites, there are also others such as making soup for the sick, discarding the outworn furniture, etc. In some areas, the young get their horses out and make a performance on it before the night falls on.

Upcoming Red Wednesday: 2008-03-19

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