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Nowruz in the land of Taleshan

(Iran and Caucasus)

Talesh is the name of a tribe with an ancient history that lives in a region with the same name located to the west of the Caspian Sea. This region starts from the Sefid-Rud river in the Gilan province of Iran and extends to the Kura (or Cyrus) river, parallel to the Talesh mountains, in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Before the annexation of a part of Talash geography to Russia, which was formed as a result of the disgraceful Treaty of Turkmenchay, all of Talash was part of Iran as a result of which the

culture and civilization of Talesh were of a unified identity under the banner of a single religion and language.

The Talesh region of Iran includes the cities of Astara, Talesh, Rezvanshahr (Talesh-e Doulab), Masal, Shanderman, and parts of Fouman, Shaft, Sowme'eh Sara, and Anbaran, covering an area of 5413 square meters and a population of about 600,000. The Taleshan population in the Republic of Azerbaijan is also about 800 thousand people, excluding the Talesh diaspora in Russia. Available

information proves that the language spoken by the people of Talesh is rooted in Old Persian (Asgari Khanqah, Asghar: 1388-89, 13).

Nowruz, not only has a great role in the identity and solidarity of today's Iranian society, but it can be a connecting thread between all those who love and celebrate Nowruz outside the geographical borders of Iran. This is because the common culture and mythological symbols play the greatest role in the solidarity of nations, and the perpetuity of national and religious such rites as Nowruz are important from this point of view.

The culture of the people of Talesh is a mixture of customs, beliefs, and national Iranian traditions combined with mystical-religious elements. This fusion has been able to establish a musical culture the scope of which ranges from "Nowruz chants" (as a symbol of national beliefs in this community) to "religious poems, in which religious leaders are praised on the occasion of their birthdates." (Kazemi, 2010)

The people of Talesh living on the other side of the Iranian border celebrated ancient Iranian festivals and rites with greater enthusiasm than the people of this ethnicity living in (Ibid.)

What follows are some details of the important customs and traditions of the people of Talesh during Nowruz.

Frying and roasting edible seeds and rice:

Women of Talesh roast and fry rice and other edible seeds like lentils and wheat after soaking

and draining them, usually on fire and by using clay pots.

Planting greenery and flower arranging:

About two weeks before Nowruz, the women and girls of the family put seeds like wheat, lentils, corn, peas, and orange in clay, porcelain, zinc, or plastic dishes filled with water and wait for them to sprout. Also, they pick fragrant forest violets and primroses and arrange them in the form of a small bouquet for Haft-sin as a symbol of the advent of spring and the revival of the earth. In some regions like Astara the branch of the evergreen and an oily plant with deep green

color, which is called "Zargand" in the Taleshi dialect, are collected from the forest and used for decorating the Haft-sin table.

■ Reciting Nowruznameh:

Reciting Nowruznameh is a custom, which usually begins at the beginning of the last month of the Iranian calendar (approx. around 21st February) and continues until "chaharshanbeh-suri" and some youth (2 to 4) go door to the door, knock the door or ring the doorbell, enter the premises and start reciting poems, the content of which are in praise religious leaders, ethnic heroes, and nature. After that, the owner of the house comes out and gives them a gift, which is usually cash or some rice and the poem reciters also give a small branch of the buxus, which is a symbol of blessing, to the owner of the house and he/she puts it in the place where rice is stored.

An example of Nowruz letter poems in North Talesh (Caucasus):



Translation:

It is spring, It is New Year

اَوَه سُورَه، اَوَه سُور

When spring comes

وَ خَتِي اَوَه سُور دَمَه

Everywhere is green

كَ اَووبَه، مَحول هَمَه

The swallow flies and comes

يَرِ سَتِلَه پَرِي اومَه

It is New Year, It is spring

اَوَه سُورَه، اَوَه سُور



The culture of the people of Tالش is a mixture of customs, beliefs, and national Iranian traditions combined with mystical-religious elements. This fusion has been able to establish a musical culture the scope of which ranges from “Nowruz chants” (as a symbol of national beliefs in this community) to “religious poems, in which religious leaders are praised on the occasion of their birthdates.”



■ Chaharshanbeh-Suri (Kulukuli Wednesday)

The people of Talash go to their local cemetery on the eve of the last Wednesday of the year to visit the graves and recite Fatiha for their deceased one. After it gets dark, they light fires in three or seven places using rice straw. Usually, the elders hug their little children and jump over the fire three times and recite certain poems.

■ Examples of songs in North Tالش language:

Translation:

O Fire, Wednesday fire

کولو کولی چارشنبه

I give my yellowness

زر دیم دثو ب ت

O fire, give me your redness

ک اشت سی بده بمن

O Fire, Wednesday fire

کولو کولی چارشنبه

■ Nowruz special cuisines:

The nature in Tالش, the variety of food, and the art of cooking are three important components in cooking and preparing food for the last Wednesday of the year and the first day of Nowruz. Fish, which is usually the Caspian white fish, is stuffed with aromatic vegetables, pickles, and walnuts and fried and served with rice. “Lavangi” or stuffed chicken is also one of the most delicious local dishes. “Ba Satrama Ordak” or stuffed duck, is placed under the rice pot and cooked with its steam. “Sabzi Kuku” which is prepared from green vegetables, eggs, and garlic leaves, and also walnut patty, or “Vuzeh Kuku” which is prepared from walnut powder, vegetables, and spices are other special cuisines of Nowruz. But the most important food of the Tالش people is “Pateh” or “Tarah”, which can be called the national dish of the people of Talash. This food is prepared from natural edible greens collected from the forest and is mixed with a little rice added to it and has healing properties and a special taste.

■ Splashing water (Aw pashandi)

Early in the morning on the last Wednesday of the year and before the morning prayer, the head of the family jumps three times over the clear water of the nearby river or spring and brings some water home, and sprinkles it on the family members so that they wake up and jump over the clear water too. While jumping, they make a wish that their morals and our hearts would be as clear as water during the new year.

■ Sizdah Be-dar day of nature:

The people of Tالش consider the 13th day of the month of Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian calendar) as the day of harmony with nature and go to the heart of nature to spend the day. On this day, even the sick members of the family should stay at least thirteen steps away from their house and spend the day in nature. At noon time and upon hearing the midday call to prayer, young girls and boys tie the green sprouts they have brought from the Haft-sin table and wish that they would be married before the end of the year and then throw it into the river. On this day, people play their local games and in addition to shopping at the local bazaar, the musicians perform music



with such instruments as reed, sorna, and tambourine.

Among the social functions of Sizdah Bedar, we can mention the familiarization of boys and girls of marriageable age with each other, listening to each other, and the glad tidings of possible upcoming wedding celebrations.

■ Nowruz meeting and peacemakers “Eid Avini”:

On the morning of the first day of Nowruz, the people gather in the house of the head of the community. At first, a literate and trustworthy person recites some verses of the Holy Quran, and then a Nowruzname reciter recites poems in praise of spring in a pleasant voice. And then those who have not been in good books for some time reconcile, shake hands and embrace each other.

In Talesh villages, too, young people gather and start paying visits to all the houses, especially the houses of those who have lost a loved one or have a sick person at home and wish them a year with good health.



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