



# Nowruz in the Indian Subcontinent

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**T**he ancient Nowruz festivity, which entered the Indian Subcontinent from Iran and intertwined with different cultures of this land, is celebrated among many communities of this Subcontinent; involving special customs.

## ■ History of Nowruz Celebrations in the Subcontinent

During the reign of Islamic rulers in this land, Nowruz was celebrated as a national festivity. Jalaluddin Mohammad Akbar (1542-1605 AD) played an important role in the spread of Iranian culture in India. In 992 AH/1584 AD, he abolished the lunar calendar and substituted it with the Iranian solar calendar.

During the 18 years of Jahangir's rule (Akbar Shah's son), Nowruz celebrations were held from the beginning of the Iranian month of Farvardin (coinciding with March 21) for eighteen days and would end with "Jashn-e Sharaf" (lit. celebration of honor) on the nineteenth day. The day before the start of the celebration and the last day of the celebration

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was dedicated to exchanging gifts and paying alms and charity.

According to the works of famous historians such as Abolfazl Alami, the author of Akbarnamah and A'in-e Akbari, and Mullah Abdul Qader Badayouni, the author of Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, Nowruz celebration was of great importance in the court of the Mughal emperors of India and was held with great interest and splendor. Nights were decorated with colored lanterns and Persian and Indian songs were sung.

### ■ Nowruz among the Parsis (Zoroastrians) of India

Iranian festivities, especially Nowruz, became popular among the people of the Indian Subcontinent and the royal courts since the time of the Ghaznavids and reached their peak during the Timurid era and other Turkic dynasties. One of the factors that greatly contributed to this prevalence was the presence of Zoroastrians migrating to India. The Zoroastrians of the Subcontinent, who live mostly in western India and southern Pakistan, clean, perfume and decorate their homes from the morning of Nowruz. They believe that by doing so,

they lead the guardian angels into the house and the fireplace. Flowers such as roses, marigolds or calendula, or "Ashoka" leaves are also used to decorate the house. Their traditional breakfast on the first day of Nowruz comprises sweet noodles cooked with raisins and almonds. After the Haft-Sin custom, Parsis go to the fire temple to perform the religious rituals of Nowruz following which relatives and friends gather together to celebrate.

### ■ Nowruz in Kashmir

Nowruz is a special day for the people of Kashmir, which is mostly associated with prayers and special religious ceremonies and get together of relatives.

The importance of Nowruz for the Muslims of this region is due to the fact that according to Islamic sources, many important events have taken place in the history of the prophets on this day. According to these sources, the creation of the world and the creation of Adam took place on Nowruz, Noah's ark rested on Mount Judi, the Prophet of Islam cleansed the Ka'ba of idols, and most importantly, the event of Ghadir-e Khumm coincided with





Nowruz. For this reason, some people fast on Nowruz and offer special prayers on this day. Nowruz is more of religious importance among the Muslims of the Subcontinent and is associated with prayers and supplications and they believe that Nowruz prayers are definitely answered. Some ancient customs such as “Chaharshanbe Suri” and “Sizdah Be-dar” are not observed in this region.

### ■ Nowruz in the Gilgit Region

Gilgit is one of the five provinces of old Kashmir that is part of northern Pakistan and has long and snowy winters. The inhabitants of this region look forward to the arrival of spring from mid-winter and set up beautiful celebrations to welcome it. The day before Nowruz, they go to the mountains and plains to pick the first blooming spring flowers and present colorful bouquets of desert flowers to the graves of their deceased ones and distribute special cookies as charity at the graves of their loved ones. In the Gilgit region of northern Pakistan, Nowruz celebrations are accompanied by fireworks and polo games.

### ■ Nowruz in Sindh

The general belief of the people of this region is that change of year in Iran coincides with Aries and it is time in which prayers are answered and the wishes are fulfilled. Thus, all the members of the family gather together, place a bowl full of water on a large tray, and put flowers in that bowl of water believing that at that moment heavenly breeze blows and revives the earth that was dead in the winter and spins the flowers in a bowl of water. At this point, the head of the family recites the New Year prayer and the others follow him. This act is repeated 365 times, then the head of the family sprinkles the bowl of water with his fingers on all the people, and this ceremony is considered to be the source of blessing and happiness.



### ■ Nowruz in Lahore, Pakistan

In ancient times, Nowruz was celebrated in Lahore with grandeur, and even today the people of Punjab state welcome spring by flying kites (Basanti). The main center of this celebration is Lahore, the cultural capital of Pakistan. On this day, the sky of the city is full of colorful kites, and children and old and young enthusiastically participate in flying kites on the rooftops. They call Nowruz “Alam Afrooz” because, with its arrival, it makes the world bright and lively.

### ■ Nowruz in the City of Lucknow

Lucknow is one of the important centers of Shiites in India and Nowruz is very popular among the Shiites of this city and celebrated with great enthusiasm such that it should be considered as one of their great religious festivities. In addition to certain religious rituals and prayers, the people of Lucknow sprinkle colored water on each other with small pumps and in this way decorate to make Nowruz colorful.

### ■ Nowruz in Peshawar

Nowruz is also very popular among the people of Peshawar. Men, women, and children celebrate it by going out to the gardens and meadows and walking in them barefoot, and believing that it would enlighten their hearts.

### ■ Nowruz in Parachinar

In Parachinar of Pakistan, women go out with guns and hunt in meadows and near riverbanks, and men engage in local games in the open. Some people gather in large squares, holding colorful flags, and celebrate Nowruz by making merry there and spending the day congratulating each other until evening.