

NOVROUZ IN AZERBAIJAN (information data)

Key words: Azerbaijan, Novruz, Oghouz oghlu, March 21, culture of husbandry, hunting, Spring Holiday, Water, Fire, Wind, Soil, Qodu, Kossa(symbol of dying poverty-trans), Kechal (Bald headed)

Azerbaijani people have created various festivities, which are connected with their earliest agricultural, husbandry and cattle breeding imaginations. These festivities have been filtered like majestic spring waters, fixed in the the memories of our ancestors and decorated by sweet, lovely songs, myths of the earliest conceptions, rituals, traditions, beliefs and ceremonies. Through hundreds of years the rythms, words and couple of these festivities' songs have been violated or forgotten... But Azerbaijani people have restored the violated rhythm and forgotten words of these songs with enthusiasm and decorated them with various yallies*, rituals, worships, ceremonies, passionate dances, various games and out-door shows which reflect the great moral values of Azerbaijanis.

One of the great festivities of the Azerbaijani people is a Novrouz Holiday. Traditionally it is celebrated annually, in March 20-21-22 (by the old calendar during the period covering the 7-th, 8-th, 9-th of March).

Long before our century, this Holiday, which was celebrated in Azerbaijan, was associated with numerous humane feelings as well as progressive views of the people.

The historical sources that have come down to us contain rich real facts and illustrations concerning Novrouz.

“Avesta” estimates Novrouz as a festivity by means of which the people used to worship for wealth and devout. Even it is represented as an agricultural festivity. “Avesta” directly states that as a sowing festivity Novrouz is the beginning of health and wealth.

As far as the origin of the festivity is concerned, various legends, fables and myths are widely spread both in Azerbaijan and those countries of the Middle East and the Middle Asia where Novrouz is practiced. In this legend Novrouz is bound up with various historic events and facts fore-running Zoroastrianism and Islam. For example, it is stated that Siyavoush, Keykavous' son, who turns to be a descendant of Iran and Touran (Siyavasharan, according to “Avesta”) visits Afrasiyab's country. Afrasiyab gives Siyavoush a warm welcome and by

marrying his daughter Afrasiyab and Siyavoush become friends. Siyavoush, in his turn, eager to leave fond memories of himself, construct a blank wall round Bukhara. But the enemies could spoil the pleasure and soon Afrasiyab and Sayavoush were on bad terms with each other. Afrasiyab murders Sayavoush and throws his body on the wall of Bukhara. But the Zoroastrians were able to bury Sayavoush's body in front of the Eastern Gate and in honour of Siyavoush many funeral lamentations had been composed which were very popular and known among the people as “Zoroastrians' sobbing”. Those lamentations which have come down to us witness that later it was just Siyavoush's funeral day that was reputed for Novrouz and since then on it is

* The most ancient and popular collective dancing tune of the Azerbaijan people which is also widely spread in the Eastern countries (**trans.**)

being celebrated as a sacred festivity.

According to the other mythology Novrouz celebrations have originated from some other and much earlier events. One of the ancient of them we can see in Azerbaijani myths: “The son of Oghouz, as cave-dweller, always dreaded of winter. That’s why he used to make preparations for winter during all the three seasons; he would gather all earthly blessings in his cave. One year the winter seemed to go on for ever. Hidden provisions had already come to a close. On the 30th day of the Long Chille* the desperate situation forced the son of Oghouz to come out of the cave and seek salvation from hunger. He tried as much as he could, the misfortune wouldn’t turn away from him; his beard became covered with ice, his hands and legs got frozen. On his way back, when he met a wolf-cub he was feeling quite upset.

“Where are you coming from in such a snowy weather, the son of Oghouz? – asked the wolf-cub.

The son of Oghouz told him everything about his sufferings. He complained to him of the months of year. He said that to them the months were not always the same. During some of them they lived well enough, while some others brought them nothing but starvation. Some months

he praised to the skies, while others he cursed violently.

– “You, the son of Oghouz, go straight ahead. At the crossroads you will find a herd of sheep, an armful spike of wheat, a spindle and a handmill waiting for you. You should take them to your cave. Slaughter the sheep and eat its meat. Spin its wool by the spindle, sew clothes for yourself and put its fur on. You should mill the wheat and make bread of the flour.

You will see the spring. But by that time you must have taken care of all the things that I have given into your charge. The wheat-ear and the sheep ought to have been under your personal care. The lambs should be raised with love and care. Use the sweat of your forehead to water the wheat seeds. In case you can’t obey my instructions life won’t grant pardon to you”.

The son of Oghouz hurried to the road-crosses and brought all the above-said to his cave. He spent the winter in a cheerful mood.

As soon as the spring came he took the herd to the mountains, sowed the seed to the soil. Day and night he was looking after the sleep and yellow wheats. One could hardly believe that the affairs of the son of Oghouz should flourish to such an extent. Since then the son of Oghouz would toil during the whole year/ just from the 30th day of the Long Chille when he had met the Wolf’s cub he began to make preparations for the festivity. For the whole five days he would be eating, drinking, practicing music and dancing to it. On this occasion he also visited his near and distant relatives. The son of Oghouz thought proper to consider that day for the starting point of the New Year and named it Novrouz. He got accustomed to celebrate Novrouz annually and Novrouz always brought him luck.”

The sources state that during the period of the Ahamanies’ supremacy (558-330 B. C.) the celebration of Novrouz acquired the status of a real public tradition. And this case is elsewhere explained as follows: Novrouz inspires people to live and struggle for life; it urges one to make an adequate choice of profession and it is just Novrouz that has laid the foundation of agriculture.

Later on these mythological imaginations of Novrouz assumed ever greater realistic

*.Long Chille “commands” during the first 40 days of winter, then 20-day Short Chille comes The latter is usually severe and frosty, while the former is “kind” as its most days are “mild” (trans.)

importance and various beliefs and religions, as well as shahs and rulers tried to associate it with their own names. Zoroastrians tried to associate Novrouz with their customs and traditions. Such attempts have been made later by the others as well. The legends to associate Novrouz with Jamshid and Kaymuras, the rulers of Iran, are of this type.

The representatives of the religion have also tried to interpret Novrouz in accordance with the very essence of Islam. For this purpose on that day they used even to crown the caliph. But neither Zoroastrianism, nor Islam could subject Novrouz to their influence. An eloquent testimony to this is Novrouz has fully preserved its humane essence and reached our days. What's more, for its whole history Novrouz has been considered a real national festivity which is quite free from religions and beliefs.

More perfect estimations and information about Novrouz still live in memories of history. The books of Arabic historian of the 11th century Abou Reihan Al-Biruni (973-1048) "Found Memories of the Ancient Peoples", "Ganuni-massudi" (The Law Of Happiness-**trans.**), "Attahafim"), O.Khayam (1045-1131) in his book "Novrouznameh" (The book of Novrouz-**trans.**) and Nizamulmulk in his book "Siyasetnameh" (Policy book-**trans.**) contain sufficient information about the creation and spread of Novrouz.

O.Khayam's "Novrouznameh" reads: "Jamshid issued a decree to name that day (beginning of March, the month of Farvardin * -**trans.**) as Novrouz. He laid down the law to celebrate and to consider that day for the beginning of the New Year".

Celebrations of Novrouz as an ancient festivity are confirmed by authentic literary sources as well. A.Firdovsy's "Shahnameh" (The Book about the Shah-**trans.**) states that Novrouz is celebrated early in March, the first month of the Iran Calendar.

N.Ganjavi's "Iskandarnameh" (A book about Alexander from Macedonia-**trans.**) and A.Navai's book "Saddi-Iskandary" (Alexander Wall-**trans.**) Novrouz was celebrated as a grand national festivity as long ago as 350 B. C. It is no mere chance that in Nizami's "Iskandarnameh" Alexander paid a friendly visit to Noushaba, the ruler of Barda, just in Novrouz.

Furthermore some original sources see Novrouz in the perspective of the Calendar festivity e. g. the beginning of the new labour season is fully conditioned by the immediate causal relationships between the move of the Earth round the Sun, and the changes of seasons and coming of spring after winter. Since the Novrouz day was interpreted as the coming of spring and the beginning of the new labour season, it was celebrated as a great day, as Novrouz festival.

Novrouz has enormous effect on the public mind and has given rise to so many yallies and dances, ceremonies, customs and traditions, games and songs.

The book under the title "Novrouz festivity" aims at reflecting both the humane and educative essence as well as the ethnographic properties of this public holiday. Besides dealing with the evaluational periodisation of the history of Novrouz, the book also contains literary patterns which are certain to illustrate the specific features of each period taken separately.

The book consists of the following sections: "Songs before Novrouz comes", "Preparations for Novrouz", "Novrouz songs", "Novrouz riddles", "Novrouz proverbs and sayings", "Novrouz laudations and damnations", "Novrouz performances", "The remarks of the festivity" and "Novrouz beliefs, traditions and ceremonies".

* The first month of the year by sola Calendar in Iran which corresponds to the period between the 21st of March and 29th of April (**trans.**).

The section titled as “Song before Novrouz comes” is mainly composed of the ceremonies and songs based on the wishes of the people which are confined to the sphere of “rich harvest”. As for the content of the subsection “The noisy ceremony”, it is limited to the mere description of the life of a people who is a creator of the early agriculture. All the participants of the ceremony gather the impression that the more they crave for abundance, and the more they wish the White heaven the Blue heaven and the Black heaven to create for them a profusion of foodstuffs, the havier the harvest they’ll gather and luckier they will be during the rest of the year.

The unification of the early mythological and half-mythological ideas with the ideals of the Man who is always striving to communicate with the Nature does essentially highlight the poetic atmosphere of the ceremony.

Various poles of the heavy life of a farmer, his day-dreams and sufferings have been consolidated within several songs of a sower as a result of which the specific details of the old life have acquired the power of a literary truth:

My seeds have grown into Samani* ,
Hush ho, my draught ox, hush ho!
Samani has become quite eatable
Hush hi, my draught ox, hush ox ho!
Hush ho, my draught ox, hush ho!

Or:

What ho, what ho, what ho,
Hush ho, hush ho, hush ho,
The holder easily takes an offense
And bears a grudge against every look and utterance
When a plough can’t get over a stone
An ox seems to have offended the other;

“The Support Ceremony”, usually celebrated before Novrouz, is also rich in wise ideals. The ceremony was first spread among nomadic people; only later it become famous among those who preferred constancy. The aim of this ceremony is also associated with abundance and a peaceful life. According to Novrouz, for every person there are three ways of gaining wealth; firstly, one should strongly desire to have wealth and solemnly let everybody know about it. Secondly, one should toil day and night, and thirdly, one should never damage the interests of others. In addition, out of kindness he should be fair and compassionate. These are the main social and moral ideologies that run all.

The ceremony would start long before fecundation: the chief sherherd used to drive a sheep from his own herd to the gates of the “sheep owners” and ask them to allot their “support” portion for those who had no sheep of their own. According to the early imaginations such kind of apportion usually brought abundance and the fecundation was fortunate enough. The

* Swelling of wheat seeds before Novrouz to show the awaking of the Nature and beginning of the new time in life.

supporters would divide the “property” and thus justice would be established, since everybody would have his own “sheep” in his yard.

And the ceremony would come to an end as follows:

Supporters apportioned sheep to those who had none,
To Faty and Mahy as to everyone.
“Portions” were given to sheepless houses,
The supporter got a “portion”, apportioned it.
Tribes and nomads witnessed it for the whole month,
The gates welcomed fiancées,
Support ceremonies were held every spring.

The songs performed in the support ceremonies elevated the supporters’ labour and plenty of sheep were glorified as a symbol of lousy life.

The ceremony “Khydyr Naby” depicted in the same section integrates in itself the most indispensable components of life – the Sun, the Earth, the Air and Water. The man had the courage and acted according to the following convictions: Naby should bring the four main components necessary for bumper crop, give them to the Man and only then the Nature should change.

Khydyr Naby should bring the Sun and only then the Earth would be warmed. He should step over the Earth and the Earth would not hide its harvest from the Man and the black treasure-house would open its doors wide. Khydyr Naby should change the weather and ensure everybody against hunger. Besides, Khydyr Naby should meet the requirements of the people in water. That’s why before Novrouz came everybody waited for Khydyr Naby and when he came the people became unusually gay and gave particular attention to its celebration.

Towards evening, in the mountains the people would be waiting for Khydyr Naby who very soon would justify their hopes. It’s due to this happy reason the people would express their thanks to him in the following image-bearing expression:

He saddled the white horse
And galloped it at full speed.

Close and strong connection of Novrouz with everyday life of people is testified by the nation-wide preparation for its celebration. This point is given special consideration in the section titled as “Preparations for Novrouz”. The people would make special preparations long before Novrouz came. It has found its reflection in the songs dedicated to distaff, *nehre*^{*}, milking and “warping instrument” (*hana*). These songs tell about how people would put their home affairs in order and regulate their lives, buy new clothes, weave carpets and *palas*^{*}, make preparations for Novrouz and thus every housing would meet the festivity in good spirits.

Information given in the book concerning the laying of Novrouz table and cooking of Novrouz meals and dainty dishes once more illustrate the nationwide character of Novrouz

^{*} A churn for making butter from sour milk

^{*} A smooth carpet without any pile.

preparations.

Much prominence is given by the book to widely spread Novrouz salutations, rituals and beliefs and faith fortune-tellings and dooram-bushes. And each case is a peculiar part of the wise world of a king-hearted nation. These unfading patterns of folklore are as if somebody, raising his neighbors, relatives and to his people altogether.

From this standpoint the beliefs and fortune-telling, proverbs and sayings which are cited in the book are especially didactic. What a popular wisdom and foresight has been expressed in the saying “Don’t Knock at my wooden door, with the aim of bad purposes, otherwise your shah-door is sure to be knocked at!”

Let’s direct our attention to a nation-wide tradition called “Ear fortune-telling” or “Doorambush”, celebrated in Novrouz evening or on the last Wednesday before Novrouz came.

“The last Wednesday evening a girl or a fiancée longing for something sacred would stand behind the door. In case she heard a kind word her dream was certain to come true. If she heard a bad word her dream wouldn’t come true. That’s why in accordance with Novrouz traditions people should avoid insulting words. Those who had made some people unfortunate by their carelessly spoken unkind words could hardly escape failure themselves”.

In the mentioned detail of life truth an all-mighty precept is present; it is an appeal to kindness and goodness. At the same time this public tradition is of great upbringing value.

Novrouz traditions and customs appeal to people to be solid and morally pure and with that they try to keep people away from any unkindness and bad influences as well as acts of all possible fictitious nature.

Festive traditions of the people who created the requirement: “People on bad terms should make their quarrel up with others in Novrouz” in fact reflect the nature and psychology of the nation. The principal aesthetical ideals of the people who stand far from evil and adherence are hospitality and respect to strangers. As public traditions show this nation used to open to his guest the door of his best room, and gave him the most fruitful part of his land. According to Novrouz beliefs who didn’t appropriately appraise kindness, could hardly avoid the “paws” of evil and misfortune.

Sending somebody a samani tray, throwing a papakh (cap) to doors, casting a bag through the flue to get something prepared for the festivity are among those Novrouz traditions which seem never to be neglected. These customs, in fact were conceived with the aim of strengthening sociability and friendliness, distributing dainty festive dishes among the people, sending festive trays to all those whom poverty had prevented from doing that and in this way converting Novrouz into a nation-wide merriment.

One of the most interesting sections in the book is titled as “Novrouz songs”: it contains songs glorifying beauty, rejoicing and triumph of Novrouz.

In public literary thinking Samani is poeticized as the symbol of Novrouz.

A cultivator, having made preparations for sowing the seed which he had sprouted, sings:

Samani, save me now

And you I’ll annually grow.

The songs like once more do testify the close association of Novrouz with the life of the cultivator... Moreover, these songs would poeticize several literary details concerning the end of

Winter and beginning of Spring.

Animistic presentations of the creatures of nature, anthropomorphic views and cosmogonical ideas which are the beings of the Sky are also popular elements of these songs. From this view point the songs such “March songs”, “The argument of March and old woman”, “Long Chille”, “Short Chille”, “The fiancée broke my pitcher” and others are of special value.

As a Novrouz song “Clear away, the mist, clear away” is in fact a dialogue between the one who wants to override the Nature, and the one, who is not very keen to surrender to fate. Here the Man gains the victory over the Nature again. The Man intimidates the mist, that in case it doesn’t clear up, he is going to punish it.

The given tectual presentation of the appeal and dialogue systems are in keeping with the content of the song “Rise, the Sun, rise, the Sun” which describes the Sun in the essence of a human being.

All the ethnographic features of the Festivity have found their expression in the Novrouz songs. “Samani”, “You, Grandpa breeze, Grandpa breeze”, “You I’ll annually grow”, “Godu-Godu”, “The rain falling in drops” reflect how people wish to spend the festivity while the song “Hajalar, houjalar” is mainly devoted to the description of some festive details:

Hajalar, houjalar,
Days going longer,
Nights becoming shorter
Bags hanging
Over the flue
Children asking
For their rations aloud
– Lady, dear, stand up,
Fill our bags, please;

Among Novrouz songs, the songs, dealing with the end of winter and beginning of spring occupy a special place. In “The argument of March and an old woman” the two symbols-Winter and Spring are standing face to face. The Winter was so much severe and frosty, but still it had to lose the fight with Spring.

The conflicting demands of spring and winter have been more vividly shown in the scene “kossa, kossa”^{*}, where the mythological elements are rather active.

Kossa is a symbol of dying poverty. He does neither give birth to spring, nor present people with it. In Turkic mythologies the Kossa doesn’t represent winter and spring is not born, it, revives. Coming of spring is associated not with the notion of “being born”; it is more reasonable to explain it with the process of “revival”. Spring hasn’t grown old, it has been killed with the sword of the old woman. When the Earth is getting warmer and the sword of the cruel old woman gets blunt, the spring-girl revives and the whole world rejoices at the event.

As a symbol of deficiency, poverty and greediness and taking advantage of the severe ness of winter, the Kossa holds people in subjection and need. As for the expression “The Kossa is pregnant”, it is a bitter irony on the starving deficiency.

^{*} A clown.

So many various games and performances would be demonstrated in Novrouz. Among them galloping, fencing, horse-hunting, wrestling, amusements, rope-walking, Gipsy mockings and individual performances were of extreme popularity. The songs performed had a specifil frisky rhythm.

All these points are given proper consideration in the book.

A lot of beliefs, rituals and ceremonies concerning the life conditions, health and labour of the people are associated with Novrouz and so they have become popular and nation-wide.

Novrouz is a festivity, completely and entirely full of enthusiasm and love for the Man and the Earth. The riddles, proverbs and traditions devoted to Novrouz contain the wisdom, humane outlooks, mild and careful character of our ancestors.

Novrouz ethnographic life is an exclusively national life which is typical for the Azerbaijan people. Solely a festive of the hard-working Azerbaijan people Novrouz calls for labour and rich harvest. Therefore, in the imagination of the people Novrouz is a great nation-wide festivity which always brings success and happiness and creates abundance and prosperity. The following riddle is a striking example where the people have skillfully generalized the aesthetical ideal of Novrouz:

If you need something, Novrouz will bring it to you,
If you want a ration, again you will get it.
In case you bend down and pick a flower,
If will award you a month, a whole happy year.

Novrouz Holiday depicts the entire beauty of Novrouz as a great holiday of the Azerbaijan people.

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