
TIRGAN - THE LONGEST DAY – THE SUMMER SOLSTICE

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Over 3000 years before Galileo and the western world, the ancient Zarathushtis were aware of the revolution of the Earth around the sun. They celebrated the two Equinoxes and Solstices as festivals. The first day of Summer, the longest day, the Summer Solstice, was celebrated as TIRGAN and what better way to rejoice on a hot summer day than to douse each other with the life-giving water. It is a day of picnic in the fields and parks and drenching each other with water. It is a day of fun and the enjoyment of nature. It is customary to tie a rainbow-coloured wrist band called Tir-o-Bod, representing the colours of the star Teshtar as it flickers in the sky. It shows the ancient Iranians were more knowledgeable than modern-day historians and scholars can imagine.

The name of the first month of summer is Tir. Tir or Tishtar is the brightest star visible from Earth as the rising star before sunrise for a few months in a year. Its Greek name is Sirius, and it is located in the Canis Major (Big Dog) constellation. Ancient Egyptians noted that when Sirius reappeared before sunrise around the summer solstice, the annual flooding of the Nile River followed. The Nile got flooded because of the monsoon rains at its source in Central Africa. So, they named it the Rain Star, although it did not rain in Egypt in summer. In Tir Yasht, the rain is related to Tishtar, but it does not rain in Iran during summer. *"We sacrifice unto Tishtrya; We sacrifice unto the rains of Tishtrya."* (Tir Yasht 6:12). Tishtrya again appears in winter, this time in the night sky. In its winter appearance, there is snow and rain; its relation to the rain must be from there, but it has lent its name to the summer month.

The night sky fascinated ancient civilizations, and many myths have developed. Several cultures associated Tishtrya with the bow and arrow. The Chinese visualized a large bow and arrow across the southern sky, formed by the constellation of Puppis and Canis Major. Similarly, the Egyptians depicted goddess Sopdet drawing an arrow at Sirius.

This imaginative depiction found its way into Tir Yasht 8:6, indicating the star's direction. The constellation's shape created the mythological archer Arash and the distance of its visibility before sunrise the arrow's flight path.¹ *"We sacrifice unto Tishtrya, the bright and glorious star; who flies, towards the sea Vouru-Kasha, as swiftly as the arrow darted through the HEAVENLY SPACE, which Erekhsha (Arash), the swift archer, the Arya amongst the Aryas whose arrow was the swiftest, shot from Mount Khshaotha to Mount Hvanvant."*



1-Chinese Emperor Zang (75-88 CE) is drawing a bow and arrow toward Sirius.² 2- The constellation depicts Arash the archer. 3-Egyptian goddess Sopdet represented Sirius, who brought new soil and fertility to the land by flooding the Nile.³ 4- Sirius flickers in multicolours ⁴

During the Islamic era, they reinterpreted this verse. Devolving it of the scientific information and giving it a mythological perspective by interpreting the rising of the sun and the constellation's disappearance as the melting away of Arash, who puts all his strength into the arrow and melts away but succeeds in settling the border dispute between Iran and Turan. Once again, mythology replaces science and belief replace truth.

The Arabs had imposed upon the Iranians their lunar calendar. Within a few generations, trying to keep up with the legal calendar, the ancient Iranian calendar got bungled up. The once blueprint of nature no longer aligned with nature. The festival did not align with the season, so the logical alternative was to set a symmetrical system. The best choice was the alignment of the names of the day and the month. So out went the science, and in came a logic strengthening superstition. The Iranians who had converted by force to Islam had more freedom; they managed to preserve their culture. They maintained Now Ruz and Yalda; they celebrated it on the correct day on the Vernal Equinox and Winter Solstice. That is why Zarathushtis also celebrate these two festivals on the correct date, not so with Mehregan and Tirgan.

Conclusion: Tirgan is the celebration of the Summer Solstice, the longest day, the first day of summer, and the first day of the month of Tir. The relation of Tirgan with science gets more potent by the multicoloured wristband representing the visible colours of the star Tishtrya. Arash-e-Kamangir, Arash the archer, is an Iranian asterism of the Canis Major constellation. The Greeks saw a dog; the Persians saw an archer so did the Chinese.

May Wisdom Prevail.

¹ *Tishtrya* appeared before sunrise and as the sun rose it became invisible to the eye.

² <https://www.starmythworld.com/>

³ Pictures 1 & 3 Wikipedia Picture 2 created by author. 4 <https://earthsky.org/>

⁴ <https://earthsky.org/brightest-stars/sirius-the-brightest-star/>