
FESTIVALS AS PER SHAHNAMEH

Historians, scholars and writers on the subject of Iranian festivals have depicted them as the celebration of Myths, produced stories, and attributed them to the Shahnameh. Usually, people accept the stories and never cross-check the reference. The tale of Arash-e-Kamangir - the Archer, and its relation to the festival of Tirgan, is an excellent example. Here we shall produce sections of the Shahnameh concerning some of the festivals.

MEHREGAN as per the Shahnameh

Mehregan is the celebration of the Autumnal Equinox. Scholars tell us that Mehregan is the celebration of the victory of Faraydoon over Zahak, which was on the day of Mehr in the month of Mehr. They claim their source is the Shahnameh.

The Shahnameh narrates it differently; it says that the coronation of Shah Faraydoon was on the first day of the month of Mehr. It reads, “ On the auspicious day, the first of the month of Mehr, he placed on his head the Kiyanian crown”. It reconfirms the date “The world was refreshed with Justice at the start of the new month”. Faraydoon lived long before the advent of Zarathushtra, and Shahnameh identifies his religion as “ Worship of Mehregan is his religion”.

From this, we understand that Faraydoon was a pre-Zoroastrian worshiper of Mehr (Mithra), the Sun God, and he crowned himself on the first of the month of Mehr, which was already an auspicious day in Mithraism. It is an occasion when the day and night are equal and symbolic of justice and equality attributed to Mehr. What better day could Faraydoon, as a Mithraist, choose to crown himself King?

فریدون چو بر جهان شد کامگار	ندانست جز خویشتن شهریار
به رسم کیان تاج و تخت مهی	بیاراست با کاخ شاهنشهی
به روز خجسته سر ماه مهر	به سر بر نهاد آن کیانی کلاه
زمانه بی اندوه گشت از بدی	گرفتند هر کسی ره ایزدی
دل از داوریهها بپرداختند	به آیین یکی جشن نو ساختند
نشستند فرزندگان شادکام	گرفتند هر یک ز یاقوت جام
می روشن و چهرهی شاه نو	جهان نو ز داد و سر ماه نو
بفرمود تا آتس افرختند	همه عنبر و زعفران سوختند
پرستیدن مهرگان دین اوست	تن آسانی و خوردن آیین اوست
اگر یادگارست و از ماه مهر	بکوش و به رنج ایچ منمای چهر

So we see that the celebration of Mehregan on the Autumnal Equinox, on the first day of Mehr month was an existing festival and its origin has nothing to do with Faraydoon. It being an important festival Faraydoon as a follower of Mithra decides to have his coronation on that auspicious day.

Since the Islamic invasion, Iranians have experienced in every other ruler a Zahak. They have longed for a Kaveh and Faraydoon to save them from these tyrants. Writers and freedom fighters have preferred to involve the entire story of Zahak, Kaveh and Faraydoon as the inspiration for the celebration of Mehregan. The depiction may have given short-term solace, but it limits the universality of the appeal. The teachings of Zarathustra, when promoted universally, the likes of Zahak as rulers, will not exist.

Truth is universal; it is blind to colour, creed and caste. Celebrating the Truth in nature appeals to everyone; it belongs to everyone. Distorting Truth to serve national or ethnic goals kills the higher value, the spirit of universality. Zarathustra Gathas preaches universality; the Avesta constantly blesses the good people of "Haft Keshwar Zamin", Seven Continents. The Autumnal Equinox is a universal event; everyone can relate to it. Setting the symbolic Mehregan table with seven trays reminds and renews the pledge to follow the natural steps towards wholeness, perfection, oneness and heavenly bliss, as mentioned by Zarathustra in the Gathas.

The celebration of the Autumnal Equinox with slight variations has been a cross-cultural event. Some celebrate it as New Year (Deepawali), and others as the harvest festival of Thanksgiving. Most ancient cultures recognised and celebrated the Autumnal Equinox. Sometimes other beliefs have weighed in and combined into one celebration. For the Chinese, the moon regulates their calendar, so they celebrate the full moon closest to the Autumnal Equinox.

SADEH
as per Shahnameh

Sadeh is a festival that originated in Aryana Vaejah, the arctic home of the ancestors of the Zarathustis. Saad means hundred, and Sadeh is the celebration of the hundredth day of Arctic winter, which falls on the 10th of Bahmanⁱ (30 January). Winter in the Arctic begins on the first of Aban month, 30 days after the Autumnal Equinox, marked with the celebration of *Ayeh Threm (Coming of Winter) Gahanbar*. The severity of the Arctic winter reduces after 100 days, and people celebrate and start preparing for the Arctic summer.

The Shahnameh attributes Sadeh to King Hoshang of the Pishdadiyan dynasty. It narrates that:

One day (**does not mention the date or indicate the season**), the King of the world was going towards a mountain with a group of his people; when he saw something very long and black, versatile and quick, with two eyes the colour of blood; from its mouth came smoke that darkened the day. Hoshang picked up a stone and flung it at the snake with all his royal strength. The snake fled, and the rock hit a bolder; the impact sparked a fire. It did not kill the snake but revealed a secret. The King fell on his knee and thanked God for such a gift. He designated this fire a Qibla, for he said it was Godsent; the wise should nurse this fire. That night he lit a fire as high as a mountain. The Shah and his group sat around the fire, celebrated the night with wine, and named the feast Sadeh. Sadeh has immortalised Hoshang and his feat.

Note: According to archaeological evidence, humans cooked food 170,000 years ago. According to the latest find in Israel, this date has shifted to 780,000 years. At the same time, there is definitive evidence that Homo Erectus controlled fire 2 million years ago.

یکی روز شاه جهان سوی کوه
گذر کرد با چند کس همگروه
پدید آمد از دور چیزی دراز
سیه رنگ و تیر هتن و تیز تاز
دو چشم از بر سر چو دو چشمه خون
ز دود دهانش جهان تیره گون
نگه کرد هوشنگ باهوش و سنگ
گرفتش یکی سنگ و شد تیز چنگ
به زور کیانی رهانید دست
جهانسوز مار از جهانجوی جست
بر آمد به سنگ گران سنگ خرد
همان و همین سنگ بشکست گرد
فروغی پدید آمد از هر دو سنگ
دل سنگ گشت از فروغ آذرنگ
نشد مار کشته و لیکن ز راز
ازین طبع سنگ آتش آمد فراز
جهاندار پیش جهان آفرین
نیایش همی کرد و خواند آفرین
که او را فروغی چنین هدیه داد
همین آتش آنگاه قبله نهاد
بگفتا فروغیست این ایزدی
پرستید باید اگر بخردی
شب آمد بر افروخت آتش چو کوه
همان شاه در گرد او با گروه
یکی جشن کرد آن شب و باده خورد
سده نام آن جشن فرخنده کرد
ز هوشنگ ماند این سده یادگار

NOW ROOZ
as per Shahnameh

Shah Jamshid designed with his royal Far a throne laid with gems. He ordered the Devs (giants) to carry it to the sky with him sitting on it. It shone like the sun in the sky, and on it sat the ruling King; the world gathered to see the throne; they were surprised at that sight, dazed at his fortune, and they showered gems on Jamshid; that day was named **Rooz-e-Now** (New Day). At the beginning of **Sal-e-Now** (New Year), Ormazd and Farvardin, the earth was relieved of suffering, the elders dressed for celebrations, and they desired wine and music; such a joyous celebration from that period has remained for us in memory of that royalty.

به فر کیانی یکی تخت ساخت
چه مایه بدو گوهر اندر نشاخت
که چون خواستی دیو برداشتی
ز هامون به گردون برافراشتی
چو خورشید تابان میان هوا
نشسته برو شاه فرمانروا
جهان انجمن شد بر آن تخت او
شگفتی فرومانده از بخت او
به جمشید بر گوهر افشاندند
مران روز را روز نو خواندند
سر سال نو هر مز فرودین
برآسوده از رنج روی زمین
بزرگان به شادی بیاراستند
می و جام و رامشگران خواستند
چنین جشن فرخ ازان روزگار
به ما ماند ازان خسروان یادگار

¹ According to the MazdaYasni Calendar <http://zarathushticalendar.com/>