

Wednesday Festival

A rite whose origin has long been lost

“May my paleness be yours and your brightness be mine.” “Shoo shoo sorrow! Come, happiness! Shoo shoo suffering! Come, grace!” these are among the verses that today’s grandpas and grandmas—yesterday’s youth—whisper at Wednesday Festival, the last Wednesday of the Iranian solar year before Nowrooze.

In ancient Iran, at the eve of the last Wednesday of the year, Iranian families thankfully celebrated the dawn of spring season by jumping over heaps of inflamed thorns.

The Ominous Ashes

As the tradition had it, the remaining ashes of the burned thorns were ominous. Why? Because when people jumped over them, they gave their paleness to the fire and in return received the fire’s brightness. Consequently, the lady of the house was duty bound to clean the ashes of thorns and take them out of the house and dispose them to the rubbish or dump it into the stream.

On the return to the house, the lady knocked at the door of her house and announced that she was coming back from a wedding celebration and has brought health and happiness as souvenirs for the family. The family members opened the door to the lady, believing that she had brought health and happiness for the New Year.

Pot Breaking

An instance of ancient Wednesday Festival which has now been forgotten even by grand parents is pot breaking.

After the fire ceremony, families used the pick a pot and throw into it a piece of charcoal, as a symbol of dark luck, a little salt, as a symbol of evil eye, and a penny as a symbol of poverty and had the pot by every family members to swing around their heads. The last member took it to the roof of the house and threw it outside of the house. “We threw away the agonies of the family” was the chanting that every lady repeated and all believed that by throwing the pot away they have distanced themselves from dark luck, evil eye and depravation.

Augury by listening to remarks of Passers by

On the last Wednesday evening of the year, young women who were desirous of marriage and/or anxious to travel used to make a wish and leave the house to stand on main crossways and listen to the ravings of passers by. The wishful believed that if by chance they hear happy and positive words from people’s chatting, their wishes will be fulfilled and if on the contrary their pick up sad and bitter words, their wishes will not come true during the New Year.

Trick or treat

Trick or treat has been one of

the most important ancient rites related to Wednesday Festival, where young women having made their wishes would take copper bowls and spoons under a large veil covering their faces in the evening and banged the spoon against the metal bowl and stopped at seven doors in the neighborhood. The neighbors who knew the young women had a wish or a vow usually threw sweets or nuts or even money into their bowls. If they would not receive anything it would be a signal that the New Year will bring nothing new for them.

The Pain Relieving Soup

Another important practice of Wednesday Festival was preparing pain relieving soup. Families who had an ill member used to take a vow for cooking a thick soup and have the patient eat some and give away the rest to the needy.

The seven kernel nuts

Giving away the seven kernel nuts to the needy was another of the old rituals of the last Wednesday of the year. Women having a wish would buy the assortment of nuts in shell from the shop facing Mecca and would shell them and distribute them among people. What was very important was the tale of the thorn picker that was recited during the cleaning of the nuts.

Fire cracking as a substitution for everything

During recent year, unfortunately fire cracking, using inflammable materials and dangerous explosions have substituted all sweet ancient Wednesday Festivals.

Observation of Wednesday Festival has been an ancient practice throughout Iran. Though every town did it its own way, but among kords, Lors, Belouchies and Turkes and other regions many features were in common.

A review of these practices is attractive to those who are interested in ancient Iranian culture and civilization.

Broujerd

In Broujerd, the Wednesday festival like other cities of Iran was observed at the eve of the last Wednesday of the year. The Hagi Firouz personage wearing a red robe with blackend face by the ashes of the burned thorns prepared himself for later Nowrooze festivities.

Tehran

In old Tehran people gathered thorns and carried them to town by camels and distributed them to various neighborhoods. During the evening, most old wooden furniture that had to be discarded would be added to the thorns and were inflamed and jumped over by people.

Shiraz

In Shiraz there were two Wednesday festivals, one on the last Wednesday of the year and another at the last Wednesday of the Safar month, the second month of the lunar calendar.

Shirazi people had the habit of gathering in crowds and seek fortune by consulting the Divan Hafez poetry. During older times, girls at marrying age used to visit the mausoleum of Shahcheragh, the brother of Imam Reza, as a practice that brought good luck. Even today some women that have a vow gather under the tribune of the Friday mosque of Shiraz and cook traditional sweets (Helva). Shirazi men and women believe that if they wash their hands and faces at the pool of Saadi's mausoleum, during the last Tuesday evening of the year, they drive away all illnesses for the coming year.

Gilan

The Gilanis burned harmed and frankincense seeds and washed their faces with rosewater and burned candles. The Gilanies used the ashes of burned thorns to help plants and trees grow.

Mazandaran

In Mazandaran, the Wednesday festival was celebrated by burning seven heaps of bushes representing the seven angels. They believed that fire purge the evil and death. They used to cook the 40-herbs soup for the sick and the needy.

Azarbaijan

In Azarbaijan, people go shopping on the last wednesday of the year. Women buy mirrors, combs and brooms to begin the new year with new facilities. A group of Azeri believes that water is reborn for the new year so they fill their new jugs with fresh water and pour water at the corner of each room in their

houses to drive away bad accidents and bring goodness to their homes.

Wednesday festival at other places in Iran and The world

These ancient festivals are practiced from the west in Kordistan and from the East in Sin kiang province of China and other areas where people of Iranian origin inhabit such as Yarkand, Tashghoughan and Kashghar.

In Tashghghouraghan the festival is observed on the 3rd day of the New Year. People of the area set up fire works on the roofs of every house and set up fire bowls for every resident.

In Aran and Caucasia, similar to Azarbaijan, during the last Wednesday of the year, they observe the festival. At some part of kerkiestan these festivals re also observed. In kerkiestan the rituals are observed on the 1st day of the New year during the evening and only Archa wood is burned.

What is certain is that Wednesday festivals are not confined to making fire. During ancient times other rites and practices such as group dining, singing, trick or treat; augury, and group games and traditional plays were also practiced.

The present day practices of using explosions, burning automobile tiers and the like have no relationship to Wednesday festivals whatsoever, despite the fact that they carry the name.