



Navruz: Customs and Ceremonies

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Abstract: In this article, the history and evolution of Navruz, the traditions and ceremonies of the Uzbek people of the Fergana Valley such as *khudoyi* (alms or sacrifices made for the memory of the deceased or for deliverance from an affliction), *qozon tuldi* (cauldron filled), *uy kutarish* (house raising), cooking *sumalak*, making various predictions and prophecies about the following year, girls' swinging, spectacles in parks, "first day magic", and plowing with an ox drawn plow, which are held on the eve of the holiday and after it, are described.

Keywords: Navruz, customs, ceremony, holiday, *qozon tuldi*, *sumalak*, *khudoyi*, first day magic.

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1. Introduction

Holidays were created in ancient times and in different places as a spiritual need of mankind and at the time fulfilled certain ideological tasks as well. The socio-political, historical and spiritual-educational importance of holidays is determined, first of all, by the fact that they encourage extremely important customs, rituals and traditions and further strengthen the great achievements of human culture.

The solar calendar, which was used by the peoples of the East, including the Central Asian peoples, started from the vernal equinox (March 21) and the new year's holiday – The beginning of the year (*Navsard* in the Sogdians, *Novsorji* in the Khorezm people), Navruz (*Nav* – New, *ruz* – day) [1] was celebrated. Navruz is one of the most ancient holidays of our nation, a great day that embodies philosophical ideas about time and space, revival of nature, purity, joy and mutual solidarity.

1.1. Literature review

The information about traditional Uzbek holidays can be found in a number of historical written sources such as *Avesta*, *Monuments from Ancient Peoples*, *Devonu Lugatit Turk*, *History of Bukhara*, *History of Mas'ud*, *Zain-al Akhbar*, *Kitab akhbar al-Buldan*, *Siyasatnama*, *Navruznama*, and *Shajarayi Turk*. They contain interesting information about the origin of Navruz, its unique ancient customs and rituals. In the works of famous encyclopedic scholars of the Middle Ages, the history of the origin of Navruz is interpreted in connection with the legendary kings Qayumars, Jamshid, and Sulayman. According to Beruniy, the celebration of Navruz is related to the celebration of various events such as Qayumars' accession, the discovery of Sulayman's ring, Jamshid's discovery of fire, travelling on a heavenly carriage, the Magian religion reform, sitting on the golden throne, and discovery of sugarcane. These later became the basis for the emergence of many spring traditions and ceremonies related to Navruz.

2. Method

The article covers generally recognized historical methods - historicism, scientific, comparative and logical analysis based on the principles of consistency and objectivity.

It analyzes the customs of Fergana Valley Uzbeks related to Navruz holiday. These rituals are folkloristic and ethnographic and have been reflected in a number of scientific studies.

Scientific inquiry involves systematic data collection and analysis, employing ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and archival research to uncover the meanings and practices associated with Navruz celebrations.

Comparative analysis expands our understanding by comparing Navruz customs with similar traditions in neighboring regions, identifying patterns of cultural exchange and adaptation. Logical analysis ensures coherence and rigor in interpreting findings, facilitating the formulation of sound conclusions.

These methodological approaches offer a comprehensive framework for investigating the cultural significance and social dynamics of Navruz rituals in the Fergana Valley. By employing a multidisciplinary approach, this study aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of Navruz as a culturally rich and historically significant holiday among Uzbek communities.

3. Analysis and Discussion

Navruz, a great holiday that is still celebrated with great festivities, has been formed since the time when the first ideas about space and time appeared among the peoples of the East. According to the views of that time, the year consisted of winter and summer, and after a long period of cold and hunger, the beginning of warm days was greeted with a special mood, with great festivities and celebrated. This holiday was first a tradition among settled peasants, then among semi-settled and nomadic Turkic peoples.

The medieval historian Narshahi wrote that "... more than three thousand years have passed" [2, p. 104] since Navruz began to be celebrated, while historians of our time have come to conclusion based on various archaeological materials and historical sources that "its root goes back to the Neolithic period" [3].

This holiday, which has very deep historical roots, is a celebration in the countries of Central Asia and the Middle East from very ancient times, and there are a number of historical written sources and historical works that prove that it is an ancient tradition.

Navruz holiday, which occupies an important place in the life of Eastern countries and has been widely studied and interpreted in different ways by researchers in different historical periods, reflects the philosophical, historical and national views of Uzbeks that have been formed over the centuries.

According to Zoroastrian mythology, Ahuramazda won over Ahriman after a long struggle. A big celebration was held in ancient times on the day when this legendary event took place based on ancient, philosophical and astral ideas, such as the falling asleep and reviving of nature and the lengthening of bright days after the equinox.

Since the Middle Ages, under the influence of Islam, this holiday has been harmonized with Islamic views. Although Navruz holiday, which marks the beginning of the new working season, is not completely contrary to Islamic views, the presence of traces of ancient beliefs in its composition has caused it to be somewhat suppressed. However, the views related to Navruz, which have been ingrained in the blood of the local population for centuries, could not be eradicated. As a result, this holiday was widely celebrated in Islamic way.

During the Soviet period, especially since the 1970s and 1980s, when the views of the communist ideology reached their peak, along with many national traditions, Navruz holiday was condemned as a "relic of the past". Due to the misbehavior of some local leaders, they tried to call this holiday "*Navbahor*".

In the years of independence, the national and traditional holiday Navruz found its rightful place again, and since 1989, March 21 has been celebrated as a public holiday in the country. The rich history, cultural heritage, and national values of the Uzbek people are being restored and given a new life through Navruz holiday.

Before Navruz, the streets, village cemeteries, and the surroundings are cleaned in all regions of our country, and rituals such as *Khudoyi* and *Darvoshona* are held asking the God for a good new year for everyone. People themselves try to welcome the New Year with purity. At the same time, all irrigation networks will be cleared of mud and waterways will be smoothed.

Since ancient times, our ancestors had been holding sacrificial ceremonies in early spring hoping that there would be plenty of water in the new year.

The fact that in 1873, the governor of Margilan Sulton Murodbek's permission to allocate a sacrificial animal (an ox or a cow or a ram) and a certain amount of rice at the expense of the state for the ceremony of opening the first water to the ditches in the early spring shows how important this ceremony was.

At the end of the water opening ceremony, it was also observed that participants sprinkled water to each other and had a swim in the stream. Such customs related to the abundance of water are manifestations of ancient preserved imaginations. According to Beruniy,

the legendary king Jamshid ordered people to dig wells, and water was poured into these wells on the sixth day of the month of Farwardin (Great Navruz day). People rejoiced at the prediction of such auspiciousness and bathed in the water of the stream. The next generation also continued this work of their ancestors in terms of blessing [1].

According to the ancient tradition of the Uzbeks, Navruz holiday began with the *qozon tuldi*¹ (cauldron filled) ritual, which was held in the family on the last night of the month of Pisces of the old year. According to the ritual, every household should prepare special dishes and give away *is*² in homage to the souls of their ancestors. The food and pastries such as dried apricot juice, doughnuts, green *somsa* (pie) prepared for the evening table were shared among neighbors and relatives [4].

There was a belief that if the pots were filled and a delicious meal were cooked on this day, the harvest would be abundant in the following year [5], its historical foundations were related to the holiday *Khamaspaeta* which was mentioned in the Avesta. In ancient times, this ritual was held as a ceremony related to the visit of good spirits to the house where they lived on the eve of the New Year³. The decoration of holiday tables was also connected with the household activities. For example, the table of farmers was full of agricultural products, while the table of herdsmen had more meat and dairy products [6].

On this day, housewives "raise the house" according to their annual customs. That is, they take out the carpets and felts in the house, spread them out, sweep the floor, remove the sandals (a table constructed over a fire pit embedded in the floor which is covered with a quilt and around which people sit to keep warm in cold weather) that have warmed up in the winter, and filled their place with soil and flatten. On this day, people drink dried apricot juice turn by turn in order to drive out the rheumatism of the body gained during the winter, wishing "we got rid of the winter and reached the spring, may our four limbs be healthy, may there be abundance of fruits in our gardens this year, and let Bobodekhkan (patron saint of farmers) do our crops a favour" [7]. This is fully confirmed by the information that a certain amount of sugar and dried apricots were allocated to the harem of the Kokand Khan for the preparation of juice on the New Year's holiday – *Sari-sol* (The Beginning of the Year).

Cooking *sumalak*⁴ in big cauldrons before Navruz is also a result of views related to the *qozon tuldi* ritual. The presence of a number of prohibitions in the preparation of this dish proves that it is related to the cult of fertility [7,8,9]. Huge cauldrons were considered sacred from ancient times, and special dishes were cooked in them in honor of the gods [10,11]. It was believed that the one who eats *sumalak* cooked in such pots, which was a

symbol of fertility, would have good luck and blessings throughout the year. According to information, the huge cauldron created during the reign of Amir Temur was filled every year on the day of *qozon tuldi* and ceremonial food was prepared in it [12].

On the eve of Navruz, farmers spread the seeds of wheat, barley, rice, corn, millet, rye and mung bean on seven boards and sprinkled them with water every day. On the day of *qozon tuldi*, depending on the germination of these seeds, it is determined which crop will yield a good harvest in the coming season [1]. In addition, various predictions and prophecies were made about the coming year depending on which day of the week and which zodiac the Navruz holiday – March 21 begins with [7,13].

Observers, who pay special attention to the changes in nature in the Fergana Valley, observe the signs of nature and the time of return of birds that have flown to distant lands and their appearances, and predict different assumptions about what the weather will be like in the new year. At the same time, the first days of the New Year also indicate how the coming year will be. For example, the weather on the first day of Navruz means spring, the second day summer, the third day autumn, and fourth day means how the winter will be like.

Every year, *sumalak*, *halim* and other spring dishes are cooked in big cauldrons during Navruz holiday. *Sumalak* is the most common of these dishes, and the preparation of this dish is a special ritual. The word *sumalak* comes from the ancient Turkic word *suma* meaning “barley or wheat grown for its juice”. In the work *Burkhani qot'i* (1650) by Muhammad Husayn Burkhan, it is explained that *samanu* is something similar to *holvaytar*, which is made from the sap of wheat sprouts [14]. The facts that involving the women, who are old, have many children, and have gained great respect among the people in cooking *Sumalak*, and using the *sumalak* stove as a driving tool for people's colds, young people who do not have children sit in the *sumalak* stove, confirms its relation to the cult of fertility.

Huge cauldrons have been considered sacred since ancient times, and special dishes were cooked in them in honor of the gods [10]. It was believed that the person who eats *sumalak* cooked in such pots, which is considered a symbol of fertility, will have good luck and blessings throughout the year. In accordance with the ancient belief that eating food in the same pot allows people be closer, we can say that cooking festive food in one pot unites people ideologically.

Today, in the villages of the Fergana Valley, on the day of Navruz holiday, classmates or neighborhood friends who studied in the same class gather in a house, cook *sumalak* and have fun until dawn. They also visit other places where *sumalak* is being cooked and congratulate their fellow villagers on the holiday. Such customs strengthen mutual affection between fellow villagers.

The decoration of holiday tables is also related to household activities, while the table of farmers is filled with agricultural products, the table of cattle farmers has more meat and dairy products [6]. According to beliefs, if any food were not available on the New Year's table, there would be a shortage of that food in the family throughout the year. Therefore, it has been customary to decorate the festive table with as many delicacies as possible. Umar Khayyam noted the following about this: “...in all times (the author lived and before) there was an effort to decorate the (holiday) table as best as possible... [15]”.

Since people were not engaged with any kind of work on Navruz day, young and old people tried to celebrate this day in a festive way, with joy. According to the “magic of the first day” that exists in the nations throughout the world, there are views that how the first day of the new year is welcomed, the same mood will accompany people throughout the year.

According to the “Magic of the First Day”, everyone tried to celebrate Navruz with great celebrations and joy. On the day of the holiday, people remembered their deceased ancestors, visited holy places - graves, their parents, and relatives. Then they continued

the celebration in the parks. There were various entertainments: *kopkari – uloq* (a game played on horseback in which players struggle for possession of a headless goat or calf carcass), wrestling, tightrope walking games continued until the evening. Children beat different coloured eggs⁵ and held kite flying competitions. Fighting trained quails, roosters, dogs, rams, and camels during the holiday sometimes ended with people fighting each other. Uzbeks predicted that the new year would be "good" or "bad" depending on which of the animals or birds won in such battles [16].

Navruz customs also included girls and boys swinging in the parks⁶. Swinging, which was considered a symbol of fertility, also existed in other nations [17]. In the Fergana Valley, the swing rope mostly was tied to the branches of apricot trees, and those who flew as high as possible tried to pluck the apricot blossom or the unripe apricot fruit from the highest branch [18]. It was believed that whoever achieved it, all his/her wishes would come true [19]. There were imaginations that all the sins of the person who swung would be washed away. Also, in all the villages of the valley, girls wear tassels from willow branches in their hair. According to folk beliefs, green willow branches are a symbol of the awakening of nature and the arrival of spring, the beginning of agricultural work, and bring happiness, luck, and health to the family.

From the ancient times, Navruz holiday ended with sowing crops in the fields in rural areas. These rituals also consist of several stages, including *shohmoylar* (horn greasing), *urug sepish* (sowing crops), *qo'sh oshi* (a meal cooked before starting to plow with an ox drawn plow). The historical roots of these ceremonies date back to the end of the 3rd millennium and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, and is associated with ancient beliefs [20,21] and were held on specified days of the week.

According to some beliefs, the ox is a symbol of a man, and the earth is a symbol of a woman, and plowing with an ox is considered as their mutual marriage [16,22]. It is stated about it in the Avesta ("Vandidod" Fargard 3, paragraph 24):

"The land that has not been planted and plowed for a long time is unhappy. It dreams of a plow. Such a land is a symbol of a beautiful mature girl. This girl is looking forward to having a baby and a good bedfellow".

Kipchaks of Kosonsoy district of Fergana Valley divided the first plowing the field into three days: *dastlov – khudoyi*, *shohmoylar* ceremonies were held on this day, and the elder farmer started plowing the land with oxen; *qashlov* and *boshlov* – more and more land was plowed day by day, and oxen were trained.

One of the old, respectable, wealthy elders of the village brought the first plow on the land. He plowed one, three, or five times, depending on his strength, an odd number of times at all, and then they finished the first day of plowing to prevent the oxen from getting tired. According to ancient legends, the king of the land took the responsibility of thousands of insects that died when the land was plowed and started the first plowing.

In general, the rituals called *qo'sh chiqarish* (plowing with an ox), *shohmoylar* (horn greasing), *qo'sh oshi* (a meal cooked before starting to plow with an ox drawn plow), *urug' sepish* (sowing crops) were the first working day of the farmers in the new year, and were related to the "magic of the first day" and people tried to hold them with as much joy as possible.

Analyzing Navruz holiday, which has a history of thousands of years, we can see the following common features among the ceremonies related to it: 1) lighting a fire; 2) splashing water to each other or swimming; 3) prediction; 4) drinking dried apricot juice or water with spells and prayers; 5) *qozon tuldi* (cauldron filled) ceremony; 6) customs related to eggs that are cooked and painted in different colors; 7) high places – going to hills, graves, holy places; 8) visiting each other and parents; 9) swinging of girls and boys; 10) organize a festivals wrestling outside the city; and so on.

4. Conclusion

At the heart of all the customs related to Navruz mentioned above lies the only good intention of the people – the hope that the new year will be a year of fertility and abundance. Navruz, a bright example of the worldview and spiritual potential of our ancient ancestors, along with the rebirth of nature and life, is considered a symbol of purity and joy, spirituality and unity, national pride, self-awareness and solidarity. It starts spring ceremonies and involves the whole season.

Footnotes:

1. There was a belief that on “Qozon tuldi” night if people cooked any delicious meal full of their pots, and all the dishes were filled with water, the harvest would be abundant in the following year, and the dishes full of water would be blessing by the mercy of the God.
2. The customs of giving away “Is” (cooking and giving away hot meals to please the spirit of jinn) go back to Zoroastrianism. See [23].
3. In ancient times, this ritual was held as a ceremony related to the visit of good spirits to the house where they lived on the eve of the New Year. See [24].
4. “Sumalak” – derived from the old turkic word “suma” which meant “barley or wheat grown for its sap”. In the work “Burxoni qot'i” by Muhammad Husayn Burkhan (1650) it was stated, “samanu – is a dish similar to holvaytar (sweet pudding made from oil or fat mixed with flour, water, and sugar), it is made from the sap of the new sprouts of wheat”. See [14].
5. Eggs were mainly in red colour. In Lezgins the red colour was the symbol of the sun. See [25].
6. Swinging has existed in Turkic nations since the ancient times. See [26].

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