

Jashn-e-Sadeh :

one of the biggest Persian festivities since ancient times

Sadeh in Persian language means 'hundred' which refers to one hundred days and nights left to the beginning of the new Persian year celebrated at the first day of spring on March 21st each year. Sadeh is a mid winter festival that was celebrated with grandeur and magnificence in ancient Iran. It was a festivity to honor fire and to defeat the forces of darkness, frost, and cold.

The ancestors of ancient Persians divided the year into two sections, summer and winter. Summer started from the first day of spring, 21st of March, and lasted 7 months to the 22nd of October. Then, the winter started and lasted for five month to the end of Iranian calendar. Therefore, Jashn-e Sadeh or Sadeh Festival was one hundred days after the first day of winter or 100 days and nights to the beginning of summer.

Persian legends have it that King Hushang, grandson of Gayumarth the first king of Persia, established the Sadeh tradition long ago. It is said that once Hushang was climbing a mountain when all of a sudden he saw a snake and wanted to hit it with a stone. When he threw the stone, it fell on another stone and

since they were both flint stones, fire broke out and the snake escaped. This way he discovered fire. Hushang cheered up and praised God who revealed to him the secret of fire. Then he announced: "This is a light from God. So we must admire it."

According to religious beliefs, Jashn-e Sadeh recalls the importance of light, fire and energy; light which comes from God is found in the hearts of his creatures. According to the teachings of Zoroaster, the light inside us is a sign of the





existence of Ahura Mazda (God in Zoroastrianism) everywhere. In Avesta, Zoroastrians' holy book, paradise means an eternal light.

During ancient times, Jashn-e Sadeh was celebrated by lighting fire. For Zoroastrians the chief preparation for Sadeh was and still in some parts is the gathering of wood the day before the festival. Teenage boys accompanied by a few adult males would go to local mountains in order to gather camel thorns, a common desert shrub in Iran. For most, this is the first time they are away from their families. The occasion resembles a ritual of passage to adulthood, a notable step for the boys on the way to manhood. The boys would take the camel thorns to the temples in their cities; and if it was their first time doing this, on their return,

a celebration was held at home with the presence of friends and families.

During ancient times, the fires were always set near water and temples. The fire originally meant to assist the revival of sun and bring back the warmth and light of summer. It was also meant to drive off the demons of frost and cold, which turned water to ice, and thus could kill the roots of plants. For these reasons the fire was lit near and even over water and by the Shrine of Mehr*.

The fire was kept burning all night. The day after, women would go to the fire in the morning, each taking a small portion of the fire back to their homes to make new glowing fire from the "blessed fire" of the temple. This is to spread the blessing of the Sadeh fire to every

household in the neighborhood. Whatever is left from the fire would be taken back to the shrine to be placed in one container and kept at the temple until the next year. This way the fire is kept burning all year round. The "eternal fire" also symbolizes the love of homeland which is always alive like a fervent fire in the people's hearts.

The festivities would normally go on for three days. The evenings are spent eating and giving out foods as donations, food that is prepared from slaughtered lambs and is distributed among the poor people.

The most elaborate report of the celebration of Sadeh after the dominations of Muslims over Iran comes from the 10th century AD during the reign of Mardavij Zeyari, the ruler of Isfahan. Zayari family did their best to

keep the Persian traditions alive. Bonfires were set up on both sides of the Zayandeh-Rud River to remember the Sadeh custom. The fires were kept in specially built metal holders. Hundreds of birds were released while the fireworks were lighting the sky. There were fireworks, dancing and music with lavish feasts of roasted lamb, beef, chicken and other delicacies.

Today the ceremony is celebrated somehow like the ancient times in some Iranian cities such as Kerman and Yazd. Jashn e Sadeh is also celebrated every year in Kushk and Rajavand gardens in Karaj (a township of Tehran province) splendidly with the presence of Iranian Zoroastrians and others interested in traditional Persian

ceremonies. Sometimes the fires are not lit outside and all activities take place inside the Zoroastrian temples. The activities of camel throne gathering have almost been stopped though there are efforts to preserve the tradition. However, the bulk of the Iranians are becoming more familiar with the occasion and there are gatherings and celebrations even outside the country on 30th of January each year. People will gather and pray, and then they will hold each others' hands, form a circle, and dance around the fire.

Every year, on 30th of January, thousands of Zoroastrians in Iran and other countries celebrates the religious feast of Jashn-e Sadeh by burning firewood in an open space to signify the coming of spring and

as a symbolic token of the eternal fight with mischief.

There is a cave in a mountain near Yazd, called Chak-Chak Fire Temple. Every year some special ceremonies are held in this place during the Sadeh Feast. It is believed that the last Zoroastrian princess took shelter there in 640 AD when the Muslims expanded their power to the east.

Although for the majority of Iranians Sadeh has no religious significance and no specific rituals are involved other than lighting fires at sunset and having a cheerful time, Iranians of all faiths make a collective effort at this day to keep up with their ancient traditions and to celebrate the precious things God granted humanity.

