

Cultural Iran - Political Iran

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The personality and identity of each nation is dependent upon its culture, civilization, customs, and rites, not on political borders which changes now and then in various situations. Iranian culture and civilization have introduced the following poets to the world: Nezami in Ganje, Rumi in Balkh, Naser Khosro in present-day Afghanistan, Rudaki, Suzani, in Samarkand, Saadi and Hafiz in Shiraz, and Iqbal Lahori. Today, if natural or artificial lines have created political borders, they can never erase that cultural originality: the feast of New Year’s Day (*Noruz*) is observed by people of all newly independent democratic states of the USSR. The millennium feast of Avicenna, the Tajik philosopher, is held in Tajikistan.

Common traditions and customs of each nation are transferred from one generation to another. After the conversion of Iranians to Islam, those customs and rites that were not in conflict with the basic principles of Islam remained, and Iranians saved that legacy of customs and rites of their predecessors. Not only the feast of New Year’s Day remained, but also it could get the approbation of Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq, peace be upon him. The rites of the eve of the last Wednesday of the year (*chahar shambah suri*) remained; and in principle, whatever old rites of Iran have remained, certainly do not have any inconsistency with Islam, and have been proven by history; and if there were any inconsistency with Islam, undoubtedly after one thousand and several hundred years they would have been forsaken. So also setting fire in the eve of the last Wednesday, which has still remained fully empowered, in spite of being a memory from the era of the Zoroastrian religion, can be considered to be confirmed twice in Islam: first, verses 71 and 72 of Chapter Maryam: “there is none of you except you enter into it (fire)... then we will save those who were pious...”; and second, in the narrations and sayings attributed to the Prophet and Imams there are some words about the Bridge of Sirat and passing over fire about which there are good tidings that believers will pass over it easily and safely. The rite of the setting fire and jumping over the fire, belonging either to Islam or the Zoroastrian religion, which both have heavenly sources and are common in principles, can be a symbol of this ultimate aspiration of every individual believer. In any case, this national rite and the other rites, which have been left by our ancestors and have passed through the filter of Islam through the centuries and have remained, should be saved. Any effort to forsake these rites goes nowhere; and anyone who is against the current common traditions of society, and wants to destroy them, even if he apparently achieves some short term success, but as a consequence, in the long run, he will be rejected by the nation. All of these rites, at the very moment when the pressures have been removed, will come back fully empowered. Evidence for this can be found in the Muslim states that have separated from the former USSR. In these countries, Islam has reappeared with full power.

One of the national customs and rites and cultural bases of every nation is its calendar. The

days of rejoicing and mourning which are determined according to a calendar are deeply rooted customs and rites, which have been transferred through the centuries from one generation to the next. Hereby the feast of New Year's Day—the memento of ancient Jamshid—has such a magnificence that it has captured the feelings and sentiments of all cultural Iranians (residing in Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Tajikistan,...) including Muslims, Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews and others.

The New Year's Day is that very first day of Farvardin, or in other words the first day of Aries. If the transition of the Sun to Aries is before noon, it will be on that day, and if it is after noon, the next day will be considered as the first day of Farvardin. This year the time of the transition in Tehran was before noon on Wednesday, so Wednesday was the first of Farvardin. In the countries further east than Iran, which have totally or mostly a common culture with us (and even in the eastern most cities in Iran like Khaf, Torbat Jaam, Sarakhs, Zabol, ...) the time of the transition was in the afternoon, so their feast was on Thursday; but since the times are conventional, they took reference the meridian of Tehran, which is the center.

The basis of the solar year is one complete rotation of the earth around the Sun, or, according to the belief of the ancients, one complete rotation of the sun around the earth; but in the Iranian calendar before, and for a long time after Islam, calculation of the year was not correct, and so the calendar and solar year was not in accordance with the rotation—according to the belief of the ancients—of the sun; and therefore the feast of New Year's Day and Farvardin did not occur at a fixed time. Khayyam, the illustrious Iranian philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer, who died in the year of the Hegira 515 or 517 (AD 1137 or 1139), reformed the then current calendar with accurate calculations, and in the name of Sultan Jalal al-Din, called it the Jalalian Calendar, which from that time on in all cultural Iran became common. Countries like Afghanistan, the Qafqaz region, Turkey, Iraq, Tajikistan, and most newly-freed-from-old-USSR states, celebrate the New Year's Day according to this calendar and attach particular importance to it.

In Afghanistan, months of the year are also solar months, but instead of the name of the month, they use the name of the related zodiac: Aries, Taurus, Gemini,.... Though the USSR made lots of efforts to efface the principles of the nationalities of its dependent Muslim states and give them a new nationality which it wanted to make, to be called the Soviet nation, and in this direction even changed their calendar, nonetheless, it did not become successful, and its invented nationality was not realized. The beliefs and traditions of these states remained like embers hidden under ashes and the breakdown of the USSR was like the blowing of the wind that caused the ashes to be removed. There was a completely reasonable hope that these countries would become coordinated with their cultural brother, present-day Iran, and they all would be associated to foster the mother culture; but unfortunately this did not happen, on the contrary that very brief interest which was expressed by them at first disappeared; and they kept aloof more from us and this matter touches the national and religious feelings of every Iranian.

Two important points that are helpful toward cultural unity are equal calendar and equal alphabet. It is the duty of us Iranians to save these brothers from the remainder of mental bondage to the USSR and help them back in their mother culture's arms. Today, since politics and political borders rule over all matters, if we insist on calling Khayyam, Avicenna, Abu Rayhan, Najm-al-Din Kobra, Iranian, in the minds of listeners this word, Iranian, is interpreted as political Iran and causes a reciprocal bigotry. It should be understood that these great ones belong to all of us and to cultural Iran and not to Iran with political borders.

About the Christian calendar there is this story that several centuries after Khayyam, Pope

Gregory XIII (d. AD 1585 /AH 963) appointed a board to reform the [Julian] calendar and this board reformed the calendar as Khayyam had done. They either didn't have any news about the work done by Khayyam several centuries earlier, or out of bigotry they didn't mention his name; and they called their own reform the Gregorian calendar that is still used.

Khayyam, though from Neishapur, actually belonged to the civilization and the culture of the Islamic society of those days and it was for this reason that his reform became common in the whole realm of cultural Iran of that day. One should recommend to these brothers and members of the society of cultural Iran that they abandon the Christian calendar, and reestablish Prophet Muhammed's Hegira as the origin of history, and use Khayyam's reformed calendar with the months of that calendar (Farvardin, Ordibehesht, Khordad... or Aries, Taurus, Gemini ...).

In order to remove the illusion of bigotry of nations within political borders, and so that it is not imagined that Tehran is after political supremacy, and so these brothers do not think that after having been delivered from the dominance of the USSR now Iran (politically) aims to hunt them, to specify the first of Farvardin, we should not take the meridian of Tehran as the reference point, and in honor of Khayyam and to glorify him in Iran and all neighboring countries, the meridian of Nishapur should be used.

Another important thing is alphabet and after it the status of the language. I remember during days of my being a student in Paris, I had a discussion with a Turkish student, who called Mawlavi (Rumi) a Turkish poet. In response I said: "a personage of the stature of Mawlavi belongs to the world; but aside from this matter, if you answer some questions of mine then I will ask you to which nation Mawlavi belongs." I asked: "The mausoleum of Mawlavi is in Konya. In the inscriptions of his mausoleum there are some words, can you read those inscriptions?" He answered: "Ataturk changed our alphabet and since those inscription are in the old alphabet I can't read them." I said: "But I can read them," and I continued and said: "In museums there are the drafts of some of Mawlavi's works in his own handwriting. Can you read them?" He answered: "For the same mentioned reason I can't read them." I said: "But I can read them. And dispensing with these two responses of yours I place the blame on Ataturk's shoulders who with the compulsory change of the alphabet, separated you from your past. But I as a sign of gratitude for this gift that I can read Mawlavi's handwriting, I am thankful for God's favor that if Mawlavi's writings and poems were read I could understand their meanings and I myself can write them. But do you understand their meanings?" He answered: "No." Finally I said: "Now you yourself say, was Mawlavi Iranian or Turkish?" At this point the student became silent.

Something like all or part of this conversation can be held with our cultural brothers freed from the former USSR. The millennium feast of Avicenna, as a Tajik philosopher, is celebrated, but Tajiks can not read his works. Are Nezami Ganjavi's works read in Ganje? Are Rudaki's works readable in Samarkand and Bukhara? For the honor of their erstwhile citizens, they should now do something so that they can read and understand them. In dealing with these nations we should not show bigotry in calling these well-known people Iranians; since it will cause their mutual bigotry and with mutual bigotry it will never be possible to foster unity; rather, they should be encouraged to read these great works.

Unfortunately, in political dealings with these governments and nations, less attention has been paid to their nationality, which is common. Islam cannot be the base for such a program and mission, because, firstly, since the government of Iran considers Islam as the basis of its legitimacy and considers itself the single supporter and missionary of Islam, this attitude has caused the

illusion of political dominance and it is imagined that Iran wants to take over the position of USSR in these countries. Secondly, Islam has different sects that are in ideological conflict with each other, and even some of them consider Iranian Shi'ites as infidels. The plan of *Taqrib* (Rapprochement) is not yet sufficiently successful, since its pioneers have even created distance among some Shi'ite groups; so, they cannot establish *taqrib* (Rapprochement) among them, let alone among non-Shi'ite sects. *Taqrib* (Rapprochement) can be realized through *tahbib* (love), not by intimidation and pressure. Thirdly, the enemies of Islam who are afraid of the unity among Muslim nations broaden the disputes. Therefore, to avoid these two matters, the basis of our relationship should be nationality and national pride, which cannot be opposed and considered sectarian. When this national fervor in these countries causes the alphabet to be changed, and these nations can read the works of the well-known authors like Najm-al-Din Kobra, Majd-al-Din Baghdadi, Nezami Ganjavi, . . . , since the books of these great people of literature are full of Islamic teachings, these nations will be able to find an Islamic orientation. In this way it is possible to indirectly orient them toward the realm of Islam and revive Islam, not through dispatching jurists (*faqih*) who could probably have a reverse effect and even destabilize our common base which is cultural Iranian nationality. Instead of dispatching preachers and jurists (*faqih*) first mystics, philosophers, literary men and Islamologists should be elected as intermediaries and ambassadors.

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