

NOWRUZ IN TRADITION TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT

This study tries to explain the theoretical and empirical basics of Nowruz rituals. Individual and social factors based on tradition, modernity, and religion lead to the construction of Nowruz rituals according to the action of individuals and created structures. Theoretical framework of the study is based on a combination of traditional and modern approaches. Considering the lack of theoretical framework in the present condition, a new approach is suggested in order to understand Nowruz within modernistic theories and globalization processes. According to this attitude, Nowruz is a changing, flexible, and temporal ritual which plays a role in the formation of the identity of modern man within the framework of new or modern conditions. Using descriptive-analytical method based on library methods, this study has attempted to clarify the issue. The results of the study and the practical experiences of the researcher in this field revealed that human acting has an effective role in common rituals like Nowruz.

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KEY WORDS

Nowruz, globalization, history, constructivism.

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INTRODUCTION

Some terms such as modernity and globalization, have developed fuzzy modeling of Nowruz in the religion, human, social sciences, and especially sociology texts. From among Iranian traditional celebrations, New Year celebration and autumn or Mehragan festival at the end of summer are the most popular and are naturally hold according to the Persian cultural calendar. The geographical and cultural dispersion of this celebration shows its popularity. A historical review shows that there have been various positive and negative attitudes toward this celebration, insofar as, due to the dominance of globalization term in sociology literature, different forms of its popularity and development are evident in different times and places. In this historical review, Iran society, which has been dominated by religions and especially Islam, not only has emphasized Nowruz rituals but also has considered the way of celebrating it with sensitivity and attention. From the sociology perspective, conformity and nonconformity with the Nowruz rituals has been directly associated with human acting, and society structure and in particular dominant structures of government judge the conformity and nonconformity of their followers according to that. This process has been effective in constructivism various structures from Nowruz rituals. The main question of this study introduces the various perspectives that pay attention to Nowruz rituals based on religious thoughts and beliefs of their followers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Theoretical framework of the study is based on a combination of traditional and modern approaches.

RESULTS

The worldwide development of Nowruz in ancient times

Nowruz is a celebration and ritual that because of its emphasis on renewal of nature and its simultaneity with the beginning of spring, it has had general and international acceptance and has not been restricted to certain political boundaries. In ancient times, the Persian Empire was the largest empire of the world and major powers of Egypt and Greece were its rivals. [1] Despite the opposition of the governments in these countries, Nowruz rituals were common in these countries. Herodotus believed that the ancient Egyptians were the first people who divided the year into 12 months and added 5 days to the end of it. Nowruz rituals and celebration has thousands years of history; in addition to Zoroastrians and Muslims who have different beliefs, Armenian Christians and Persian Jews in Samarkand and Bukhara as well as some cities in the Central Asian celebrate the vernal equinox and New Year. In addition to Iran,

there are celebrations and rituals at the beginning of spring in Minor Asia and Greece. According to ancient myth, in Lady and Ferri Jiu regions in the north of Minor Asia a celebration was held when the sun reached Aries and at the time of vernal equinox in honor of "Si Bel" goddess of fertility, known as the mother of gods and goddess "Otis". Historians stated that this celebration and especially the great celebration and feast for three days, March 25 to 28, i.e. 4 to 7 April, were held in all the lands of Ferri Jiu, Lady, Greece and Anatolia at the time of August King (Homayuni, 2004). Nowruz rituals and similar celebrations have existed in the past history of Europe because, before the spread of Christianity, Mithraism was the common religion of this area, and even after converting to Christianity, Christmas and January celebrations were not popular. [2] Based on the available archaeological and historical evidence at the beginning of the fourth century AD, more than 300 Mithraic temples (Mehrabeh) were in Italy, and all people celebrated Yalda (affection birth) In addition, Roman legionary transferred these rituals to the Empire territories including Germany, Austria, and England, and various Mehrabeh were built in those countries. [3]

Nowruz in Islam religion

Muslims, especially during the second Umar, Umar bin Abdul Aziz of the Umayyad caliphs who were opponents of the Shiites and Iranians, tried to revoke Iranians' holidays, and they put pressure on those who sent gifts to high authorities to celebrate these holidays. But this tradition was so deeply affiliated with the Iranian people's thoughts and feelings that could open a position triumphantly, and with the rise of the Abbasid and due to the influence of Iranian family of Barmakid in the Interior Ministry experienced revival. [4] Especially during Al-Bouet period, which formed the first Persian Shiite dynasty in Iran, it was very common and became widespread in Mesopotamia, that is, the official Baghdad and Basra. Historical landmarks manifest this type of development or, in new terms, globalization. Moreover, in other places and periods, like Syria, Egypt and North Africa, the celebrations were held irregularly in some times. For example, in India during Akbar Shah, Jahangir, and Jahan Shah Nowruz ritual was held, but of course it was different from Iran's ritual. Nowruz festival in this country has a long history, and, in addition to the Persian Indians who consider this ritual as their own local and traditional celebration, Nowruz was held in other tribes of India with the name of "Holi festival". [5] Holi which was mixed with the religion and social structure of various Indian tribes still had Iran's common symbols. In addition, in Pakistan, especially among Shiites, similar ceremonies were held. Thus, with the arrival of Islam in Iran, and the development of this religion from Indian subcontinent to North Africa, Nowruz has also become common among non-Iranian ethnic groups. [6] Documents and sources suggest that there has been no opposition with this ritual after Islam. But in Safavid period which was the first powerful Shiite dynasty, Nowruz celebration found a governmental pertinency and was considered as a more national and courtly symbol. However, with the influence of Shiite scholars on the court, the importance of national symbols was reduced and jurisprudence dominated symbols. Historical studies of Islam historical texts show Imam's attention to Iranian's rituals. For example, Ali ibn Abi Talib was asked about Nowruz, and at the same time a gift was given to him as a sign of Nowruz celebration. He asked: "what is this gift for"? They answered: "O Ali ibn Abi Talib this is Nowruz's gift." Then, Ali said that: "make every day for us Nowruz (new day)." There are other traditions in this regard that suggest that many people offered Ali ibn Abi Talib Nowruz gift, and he was receptive. The gifts were mostly sugar, wheat, and sometimes precious garments put in silver dishes. This attention was also continued in other periods; for example, Imam Jafar Sadiq (peace be upon him) quoted: O Mu'alla Nowruz is a day in which God obligated His servants to worship Him and do not associate anything with Him and believe in His apostles, prophets, and saints. Moreover, it is the first day in which the sun has raised, pregnant winds have blown, and earth flowers and blossoms were created. It is a day in which Nuh's (peace be upon him) ship was placed near Joodi mountain. This is a day in which thousands of people who fled their homes from fear of death and God caused them death and then revived them on this day. And it is a day that Gabriel was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and his family). [7] This is a day in which Ibrahim (peace be upon him) broke the idols of his own tribe. This is a day in which the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and his family) was riding Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) on his shoulders to drop Quraysh idols from the top of the house of God and crushed them. It can be inferred from traditions that Ali ibn Abi Talib never objected to Nowruz celebration, but said that every day of you be Nowruz. In another tradition Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) said that today is holiday, tomorrow is also holiday, every day that we do not sin God is our feast day. Islamic Caliphate tradition verifies the above Nowruz documents. Allameh Seyyed Jafar Murtaza writes: Sunnis celebrated Nowruz, and send each other gift. Al-Mutawakkil, the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, distributed things made of amber and special flowers among people. It is stated that he was the first person who delayed Nowruz's Day for tolerance of religious minorities, and his Abbasid mother also marked the day. Vasegh also marked the day. Mansour Davaniqi also highlighted this day. [8] The first person who put emphasis on this day and declared ancient holiday was Hajjaj bin Yusuf Saghafi. Saleh Verdani, an Egyptian scholar, writes: in the reign of Fatimid, Nowruz

was celebrated and a variety of sweets was distributed on this day. All these actions were done by Islamic caliphs in the first three centuries of the beginning of Islam, and none of the great scholars complained . [9]

Nowruz and globalization

In recent years, Nowruz has attracted the attention of scholars all over the cultural area of Iran . This attention is, on the one hand, derived from Nowruz role in politics of nationalism and independence of some countries such as Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries and ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan. On the other hand, it is the result of "globalization" and the importance of ethnic rituals in global processes, including migration of ethnic minorities to the West. [10,11] But, despite the relative magnitude of these studies, most of them are either from literary perspective devoting to praising Nowruz and Spring, or from historical point of view that consider its historical or mythical roots . Others have commercial and advertising content published in the press and media. There have been few theories to explain Nowruz in the context and structure of modern world because, as stated, the research discourse of Nowruz is essentially based on the view of historical, literary and folkloric studies, not anthropological. [12] Thus, even the anthropological studies of this area are restricted either to historical reviews or to folklore reports that collect customs of Nowruz in different areas or among literary and historical texts. Nowruz is one of the elements of Iranian culture which in recent decades more than any time in history has spread beyond the borders of the land of "Great Iran" or territories of "field of Iran culture", i.e. Central Asia, India and the subcontinent. [13] This process can be named "Nowruz re-globalization" because Nowruz had already a worldwide expanse during a course of history. Although Nowruz in some ways is known as a regional and territorial celebration and it is mostly linked with the name of Iran, in reality it is more widespread. Considering this perspective, two basic stages in the history of Nowruz can be separated. The first stage is "Archaic period" which was common in almost all the world. With the spread of Christianity, emersion of Islam and the decline of Iranian religion (i.e., Zoroastrianism and Mithraism), Nowruz found a limited scope. [14] The second stage is in step with "globalization processes" and especially "migration" of ethnic Iranian groups from Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Central Asia to Western countries and all around the world that results in holding Nowruz rituals all over world. Although Nowruz celebrations are expanding at the global level again, but the causes, functions, modalities and procedures of holding Nowruz are fundamentally different from the ancient times. Today Nowruz ritual is not hold with the past mythical narrative, but it is hold in the context of modern and post-modern needs and requirements. As we know, Nowruz archeological logic is "Nowruz myths"; such as, "the beautiful myth of creation in ancient Iran," "the symbolic myth of awakening anniversary of the nature from hibernation," "Jamshid period myth," and the legend that jam is mixed with Solomon. [15] Among these legends, the foundation of Nowruz is ascribed to Solomon . But today's logic of Nowruz is "modern and postmodern myths" that has been rarely studied and explored. Today, all of the historical myths are reproduced complexly in the process of forming the identity of Iranians because nostalgia of the past history of the country forms some of the fundamental components of human development and evolution that results in restoration and repairing the suspension and curtailment of identity at individual and collective levels by adhering to the roots and commonalities. Therefore, today Iranians and other nations, consciously (actively) and somehow "conventionally" come together to celebrate Nowruz. This deliberate and conscious essence differentiates it from the older traditions that were holding unconsciously and as cultural routines. Because these rituals are done consciously, Hebert Blumer believes that humans always consider themselves free and authoritative so that they can choose elements from the past that fit their current situation. [16] Moreover, since they are exposed to other cultures, they often combine their traditional rites with other cultural rituals and practices in "creative ways." In this regard, it can be stated that from the end of the 19th century with the massive entrance of Iran to modern era and the formation of discourses and consequently national, religious, and modern identity challenges, Iranians become more aware and conscious about the hidden and obvious layers of their culture. And gradually all the traditions and cultural rituals like Nowruz were not considered as an inherited tradition accepted and applied unconsciously but were considered as cultural and social rituals that people are aware of their meaning and existence. Thus, they seek a new identity in the modern era for themselves because there is a close relationship between modernity and identity. Modernity from anthropology perspective is a kind of knowledge acquisition procedure, recognition, and constant critical evaluation of oneself in order to make the best conformity pattern with all environmental, historical, cultural and social situations of modern period. According to this perspective, each group and society experience a unique process of modernity based on its particular situations. This process may have common aspects with similar communities and groups but have less in common with other communities and groups; therefore, the modernization process in nature has always been an adaptation to the constant localization. Thus, as James Clifford stated, in order to reach modernity, each society needs "to invent and recognize its difference from other modernities" . According to Durkheim's positivism approach in sociology, it is believed that rituals establish and maintain solidarity and social

cohesion. He argued that it is not important why group members come together, but it is important that they come together and collectively do a work. In other words, it is essential that people come together, experience common feelings, and express it as a collective action. Thus, according to Durkheim, what is important is collective action but not why they come together; the social aspect of rituals is important, and Nowruz has this characteristic. Collective ceremonies are one type of these important rituals. Ceremonies are often holding collectively. A number of people come together and exchange emotions with each other by appealing to a specific topic. Emphasis on this function of Nowruz makes it more global.

CONCLUSION

Attention to Nowruz is one of the common aspects of Iran's culture with other cultures. By offering Iran's culture and tradition in these celebrations, not only cultural differences are shown but also their cultural commonalities are emphasized. Nowruz occurs at the beginning of spring which is simultaneous with reconstruction and renewal of nature. In Iran's culture, the reconstruction of culture and renewal of society is simultaneous with the re-birth of nature's greenness and freshness. This is another sign of the union between nature and culture. In Nowruz, man, nature, and society reach a balance. Nowruz, as one of the ancient rites, possesses a complex set of different functions and relations of social life. Today, some cities of Europe have recognized Nowruz and hold it, and a number of leaders of countries send each other Nowruz messages. Thanks to advanced technologies, hundreds of songs and hymns, music, film, poetry and essays are available in cyberspace in relation to the Nowruz that help Nowruz globalization. World interest in Nowruz, like its broad popularity in the past, has shown that each religion coming to this country has never observed any contradiction with Nowruz which has been celebrated simultaneous with renewal of nature. Essentially, opposing it is opposing human nature and nature celebration which is one of the sign of God. Every creed and religion, whether Mithraic or Zoroastrian or even Islam, has been trying to give direction to this celebration which is rooted in the nature, and with the passage of time, it has been so unified with their culture that they believe Nowruz belongs to their ritual and is derived from global context. Various changes in the form and way of holding Nowruz rituals from past to present have emphasized human understanding of time and his active nature, and its continuation can be described through constructivism, dialectic structure, and acting in the form of postmodern sociology theories of Herbert Blumer and Richard Hoggart.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares having no competing interests.

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