

A Study of the Reasons for the Permanence of Teergan or "Tirmā Sizzê Šu" Celebration in the Province of Mazandaran in Iran

Abstract:

There are many festivals, rituals and celebrations in the ancient Persian calendar; amongst them, to name only a few are Nowrooz, Mehregan, Sa' adeh, Abangan, etc. These festivals and rituals mostly originated from religious rites and practices, each emanating from a particular myth. As a matter of fact, these rites constitute the practical perspectives of people's mythological beliefs and convictions. The reason why some of these ancient myths are still working is that they are still functioning in the daily lives of people. It seems that with the decline of their sacredness and popularity they start to disappear from the lives of the people. The "Tirmā Sizzê Šu", the night of the 13th of Teer in the Persian solar calendar, festival is taken to be a remnant of the ancient Persian ritual festival of Teergan. This festival is still celebrated in certain regions of Iran, especially in the north of the country. Amongst different reasons that gave a relatively permanent life to this festival in the north of the country are the special geographical as well as environmental influences. To this we should also add the religious and mythological beliefs of the people of the region.

The authors will attempt to redefine some of the major reasons that gave a lasting life to these beliefs and myths.

Keywords: myth, Tirmā Sizzê Šu, festival, calendar, Mazandaran, Arash, rain supplication

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Introduction

In the ancient Persian calendar a year comprises 365 days; each year has 12 months; amongst these, 11 months have 30 days and one month has 35 days. Each day of the month bears the name of a god or an "Amshaspand": Hormozd, Bahman, Ordibehesht, Shahrivar, Sapandarmaz (angel of Earth), Khordad, Amordad, Dey (epithet of Hormozd which marks the start of the second week in each month), Azar, Aban, Khour, Mah, Tir, Goosh (the god of useful animals), Dey (start of the third week in each month), Mehr, Soroosh (god of obedience and virtue), Rashn (the doomsday scale bearer), Farvadin, Bahram, Ra'am, Ba'ad, Dey (start of the fourth week in a month), Deen, Ard (god of reward and daughter of Sapandarmaz), Ashtad (goddess of truthfulness and righteousness), Aseman, Zamyad (Earth), Maraspand (Sacred speech and the spirit of Hormozd and his messenger), and Anghazan (vast light). (Esmā'eelpour, 1998: 94)

Whenever a day with the same name as the month coincided, they would celebrate the occasion. For example, in the ancient Persian calendar, the 16th day of any one of the twelve months is Amshaspand Mehr and because of this the Mehregan festival would be held on the 16th of Mehr each year; in the same manner, the Teergan festival would be celebrated on the 16th of Teer each year.

According to some historical books, these monthly celebrations were held until the Safavid dynasty but since then nearly all of them went out of practice as causes for public celebrations. An exception is the Teergan, "Tirmā Sizzê Šu" in Mazandarani dialect, celebration which is still commemorated among some families in the province of Mazandaran as well as among some Zoroastrian families in the province of Kerman. (Rooholamini, 1997: 23-24)

Teergan in Ancient Texts

The Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud have the first mentions of Teergan in them. The three festivals of Moterdi, Trishki, and Mehranaki, which are the variant names of three important Persian festivals of Nowrooz, Teergan, and Mehregan, are made mention of in these books. Andranic, in his "Month of Farvardin; Day of Khordad" (Andranic, 2005:136) discusses the story of Arash and Teergan. Almost all other works that recounted the story of Arash and its link with Teergan festival were written during Islamic era. One of the most renowned Islamic-era works is Asar-ol-baghiyeh of Abu Rayhan Albeiruni. Albeiruni writes: "In the 13th day of Teer, there is a festival called Teergan. Two reasons are claimed for the occasion: first, when Afrasiyab, the mythical Toorani king, defeated Iran by besieging Manoocher, the mythical king of Iran, and his army in the province of Mazandaran. Manoocher pleaded with Afrasiyab to leave him as much of the land of Iran that an arrow could travel. Then the angel Espandarmazd ordered Manoocher to ask his artisans to make a special bow and arrow. Avesta, the holy book of the Zoroastrians, says when the bow and arrow were manufactured, Arash, a virtuous and religious man, was brought to Manoocher, the king of Iran. He told Arash that he should shoot the arrow; Arash, then stood up and took off his clothes and said, "You, the king and you the people of Iran, look at my body. As you can see there are no signs of an injury or a scar on my body. Yet I am sure that as soon as I release this arrow from my bow all my body will be torn apart and I will lay down my life."

He, therefore, took his bow and arrow and drew it as far as he could and then released the arrow from his bow. All his body was torn into pieces and God ordered wind to take his arrow from a mountain in Royan (a place in the center of the province of Mazandaran) and carry it to a far-away place near Forghaneh and Tabarestan. The arrow landed on a giant walnut tree. Some believe that from the place where the arrow was shot to the place where it landed, there was a distance of 6000 kilometers. Manoocher and Afrasiyab signed a peace deal on the day when the arrow was shot and it was on such a day. The second story is that of Dahoofazieh which means preserving, safeguarding and ruling the world. And also Dahaghaneh which means the world with all its blessings. "Dahoofazieh comes from Hooshang and Dahaghaneh comes from one of his brothers who called the day a grand day and made it a cause for celebration." (Biruni, 1984; 334-333) Some other Persian and Arabic texts that made mention of this story are; Tarikh-e-Tabari, Altafhim, Tarikh-e-Bal'aami, Gardizi's Zein-ol-akhbar, etc.

As one can see, apart from "Month of Farvardin; Day of Khordad", there is no other Pahlavi texts mentioning the story of Arash and Teergan. Since most of the sources for the story belong to post-Islamic era. The reason for this, probably, lies in the fact that a sizeable amount of literature of the period was transmitted to future generations by word of mouth. In the pre-Islamic part of "History of Persian Literature", it is said that the literature of the period was preserved orally and "story tellers transmitted it from generation to generation". (Taffazoli, 1999:75)

Teergan and Its Relationship with the Myth of 'Arash Kamanguir' and Tishtar, the Goddess of Rain

A large number of contemporary researchers see the Teergan celebration as Arash's endeavor in shooting the arrow, victory of Manoocher, expelling Afrasiyab out of Iran, and demarcation of Iran-Tooran borderlines. A new perspective developed by contemporary researchers about Teergan celebration, however, says that it was also a celebration of water and rain and regeneration and blessings. This new outlook deserves and requires a new treatment; one that can determine the special place of this ancient Iranian celebration. (Esmaeelpour, 2003: 150) Biruni, in his *Asar-ol-Baghiyeh*, cites two reasons for Teergan celebration: Arash's shooting of the arrow and also two ceremonies of Dahaghaneh and Dahoofazieh. Abolghasem Esmaeelpour also reintroduces and emphasizes the concepts of Dahaghaneh and Dahoofazieh in his "Under the Roofs of Light" and writes, "Biruni in this part again mentions agriculture and construction in the world; the two major concepts of water and rain and agriculture and construction that have direct relationship with the main birthplace of Teergan. (Esmaeelpour, 2003:157)

Tarikh-e-Bal'aami writes of the Teergan celebration in this way, "Manoocher and his army are surrounded by Afrasiyab in Tabarestan (present-day Mazandaran) for ten years. He and his army are besieged inside the city of Amol and the siege comes to an end when the two parties strike a peace deal by which Arash should shoot an arrow to determine the borderline between Iran and Tooran(1973: 345-349). About the Abangan celebration, which is a festival of water, Bal'aami writes, "On the death of Manoocher, once again Afrasiyab who is a symbol of drought brings Iran under his rule. When Tahmasb's son Zou grows up he expels Afrasiyab and his army from

Iran. Every year, the occasion which is called Abangan, is celebrated on the day of Aban and in the month of Aban(Bal'aami, 1973:521).

In both Abangan and Teergan, Afrasiyab is depicted as a symbol of drought and rainlessness in Iran; "In both [Abangan and Teergan] rain stops raining on the land of Iran when Afrasiyab has the country under his ruthless rule who sometimes resorts to sorcery to stop rain. Arash in Tirgan celebration and Tahmasb's son Zou in Ababngan celebration defeat the aggressors and no sooner are Arasiyab and his army expelled from Iran that rain starts to rain (Mazdapour, 2004, 61). As a matter of fact, the myth of Arash reveals that his decisive shooting of the arrow was not merely for designating Iran-Tooran border but ending the drought and fighting the sworn enemy of the holy land of Iran. Hence two goals are achieved through his eventual shooting of the arrow; he determines a borderline between the two countries and brings to an end the draught that had plagued the country for quite a long time. This version of the myth is a reemphasis on the importance of water and rain symbols.

Arash's shooting of the arrow, that according to ancient texts, remains to be one of the chief reasons for the start of Teergan, the later Tirmā Sizzê Šu celebration, has its links with such mythological figures as Sepandarmazd, the guardian god of earth, and this according to Christiansen, is an example of the myth of time. In the myth of time, Afrasiyab, the symbol of draught is expelled from Iran so that the country can once again witness clouds that are expectant with rain, roaring rivers, oozing fountains and green valleys (Satari, 2008:170).

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Conclusion:

"Tirmā Sizzê Šu" is a descendant of the ancient celebration of Teergan which is still practiced in some regions of the province of Mazandaran. Ancient rites and festivals are usually practical reflections of mythology and mythological stories and "Tirmā Sizzê Šu" is closely related to the story of Arash and Tishtar, the goddess of rain. It seems that the mythological concepts associated with "Tirmā Sizzê Šu" are still existent; the reason why "Tirmā Sizzê Šu" has not become a defunct tradition.

Since it is now widely believed that the place where Arash released his arrow was somewhere in Mazandaran, it appears quite natural why "Tirmā Sizzê Šu" celebration is still practiced in certain places across the province. The myth of Tishtar, on the other hand, owes its permanence to the close relation that the people of this region have had with rain and water as the main sources of agriculture.

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