

CEREMONIES IN THE SOUTHERN REGIONS OF UZBEKISTAN: THE EXAMPLE OF THE SAROY TRIBE

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Abstract:

This article discusses the national ceremonies and customs in the southern regions of Uzbekistan. In particular, the rich cultural heritage of the nomadic people living in these areas is examined. The influence of Zoroastrianism is notably present, with the deity Mitra being revered as the protector of agriculture and livestock. Zoroastrian rituals have also had a significant impact on local customs. Additionally, the remnants of totemism can be observed, particularly the reverence for domestic animals among Turkic tribes. For example, the horse is considered a sacred animal, symbolizing prosperity and abundance. It is believed that if a horseshoe is nailed to a door, blessings will remain in the household and evil will not approach.

Other customs include the hanging of sheep horns at gates, the use of talismans made from the tugdon tree, and practices such as wearing evil-eye beads and burning wild rue. These rituals demonstrate a long-standing tradition of protecting from the evil eye. National traditions are a reflection of the historical memory, cultural heritage, and spiritual values of a people. The Uzbek nation stands out for its rich lifestyle, customs, and values that have developed over centuries. In today's era of globalization, these traditions are blending with modern life, acquiring new forms and meanings.

Keywords: Uzbek people, Saroy tribe, national and religious ceremonies, customs, lifestyle, livestock culture, traditions.

The Saroy people are an ancient ethnic group with a long and complex history shaped by various influences from neighboring civilizations. Over centuries, they have maintained their nomadic identity, analyzing and preserving this heritage. The depiction of deities as domestic animals reflects the sacred view of livestock in their culture. Regarding religious beliefs, Zoroastrianism, founded by Zoroaster (Zardusht), is central. Zardusht is often symbolized by the golden camel, reflecting his role as a caravan leader and spiritual guide.

Protective customs, such as using talismans made from the tugdon tree, evil-eye beads, and wild rue, are also rooted in their tradition. In addition, agricultural tools such as the plow tooth (poza) and the shepherd's staff were regarded as sacred objects. These items were used as protection against evil spirits, including jinn and witches. The shepherd's staff, never thrown on the ground or stepped over, symbolized the transfer of blessings from father to son.

The shepherd's staff was often made from spindle (irg'ay) or maple (zarang) wood and was around nine spans long, equal to the height of a person. The spindle tree was considered a symbol of honesty and purity. The Saroy herders also had spiritual patrons: Bobozangi (Zangiota) for cattle, Chopon-ota for small livestock, and Qambarota for horses and herders.

In the Vakhsh Valley (Voha), there were many ancient agricultural ceremonies with distinctive features. The people of the region strictly adhered to customs related to Bobodehqon, the patron of farming, believing in his spiritual power. Before sowing crops, they would seek Bobodehqon's blessing through rituals. "Holding the Clay" Ceremony: Before planting, irrigation ditches were dug and cleaned. During this time, if a passerby crossed paths

with the workers, one of the diggers would offer them a handful of clay using their shovel. The traveler would take it and, in return, perform a skill—singing a song, showing wrestling moves, or repairing tools. If the passerby could not demonstrate a skill, they were expected to invite the workers for a meal or help finish cleaning the ditch. “Shokhmoylar” Custom:

This ceremony took place on the first day of sowing when birds were released into the fields. It was widely participated in by the villagers, especially during Navruz (the spring equinox). The villagers prepared various dishes, shared them, and an elder would pray for blessings on the agricultural season. A portion of last year's wheat bread was distributed, and one part was given to the oxen used for plowing. Linseed oil was applied to the oxen's horns for strength, and wild rue was burned for protection against the evil eye. The elder would then lead the first furrow, plowing three, five, or seven rows, and sowing last year's wheat on the field. “Sur Xotin” (Rain Lady) Ritual:

This ceremony was performed during drought years, particularly in dry-farming regions. Villagers would create a doll in the shape of an old woman, dress it in elderly women's clothing, and walk it around the village while singing “Sur Xotin” songs. Donations were collected and used to prepare a communal meal. At the end of the ritual, the doll was either burned or thrown into a dry well, symbolizing an ancient sacrificial tradition.

Before the harvest, a “Khayrikhudoyi” (Thanksgiving) ceremony was held, during which people would pray for a bountiful and safe harvest. One of the ancient rituals was “Oblo Baraka,” where after the wheat harvest, a small area was left uncut. Harvesters would surround this spot and slowly reap inward, with one of them taking the last bundle of wheat, called “Ona Bug'doy” (Mother Wheat). The one who harvested it would shout, “Yettim-yettim, Oblo baraka bersin!” (“I got it, may there be abundant blessing!”) and keep it as a symbol of prosperity.

The traditions of the Vakhsh Valley are a priceless cultural treasure, formed over centuries, reflecting the historical experience, cultural values, and customs of the people. Each ritual, piece of clothing, food, craft, hospitality, and family value reflects the national identity and worldview of the people. These traditions continue to live on in modern society, adapted to contemporary life, and symbolize the continuity, vitality, and pride of the Uzbek culture.

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