

Tiregan

The Summer Festival of Rain

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The *Tiregan* Festival is celebrated by Iranians, particularly Zoroastrians, in the month of Tir and on the day of *Tir*. It falls around the first or second of July.

It should be noted that the Iranian Calendar precisely starts on the first day of the vernal equinox, March 21st. It is 365.2422 days long. It is the only precise calendar in use, and it has each of the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn and winter—start on the first day of each corresponding month: The first month is Farvardin, the fourth month **Tir**, the seventh month Mehr, and the tenth month Dey. It may also be noted that the Zoroastrian Calendar has the same names of the months as the Iranian Calendar, but each day of the month has its name rather than just numbers. The names of the first thirty days, which are named after deities, have the names of the twelve months. Therefore, when the name of the month and the name of the day are the same, that day is celebrated as a festival. The name of the festival is formed when the relative suffix *-gan* is added onto the month. This is where the name **Tiregan** comes from, as well as Farvardegan, Mehregan, Deygan and so on.

Tir is the Persian form of Tishtar in Pahlavi and Tishtrya in Avesta. The Tir Yasht (Tir Veneration) is a poetic piece in the Avesta, which describes the activities of the Rain Deity. It has 62 stanzas to tell us the great feats of Tir in fighting the demon of drought and making rain to maintain the good earth. Let us take a look at an overview of the Tir Yasht:

“Tir (Avestan Tishtrya) is a rain star whom the people await to come and dispel the dry spell. He comes, changes shapes and finally, in shape of a white horse, defeats the black horse Apaosha, the demon of drought. As a consequence rain, cloud and hail shower the people. A happy ending (Sections and stanzas 1.1-7.35)! Again the people await him to dispel the dry spell. He comes and vanquishes *pairikâs* (witches or demonesses of drought?) and lets the rains flood the seven climes. Another happy ending (8.36 to 13.44). Again, in the shape of a white horse, he surveys streams and rivers to distribute waters (14.45-48). He bestows life to all creatures (Section 15 only one stanza). He fights a single *pairikâ* of drought and binds her fast (16.45-55). Ahura Mazda tells Zarathushtra that people should offer Tishtrya befitting prayers, libations, *baresmans*¹ and a roasted sheep so that they are protected from flood, disease and enemy attacks. Nothing of the roasted meat should go to a bad man or woman (17.56-61). Salutations (stanza 62). Three versions of a single story and a little more.”²

But at present there is no rainfall during the month of July and more. A search reveals the Monsoons of the Indian Subcontinent, especially Pakistan. I have, during my appointment of seven years in Pakistan by the Ministry of Culture and Art, the Iranian Government (1969-76), observed that the Monsoon rains began from a week before and to a week after the first of Tir, 22

¹ A bundle of sticks which form a ritual implement common in Zoroastrianism.

² See ‘The Avesta at a Glance’ 1999

June. Much earlier, I read an article by a Parsi scholar of India that some 1,500 years ago, we had the Monsoon cover the Iranian Plateau as well, but the subsequent devastation of its forests, turning parts of the Plateau into deserts, have caused the Monsoons to move and to cover the fertile land of the Indian Subcontinent only. Let us pray for the day when the reforested Iranian Plateau will be grateful to the Rain Deity for the return of the Monsoons.

It is interesting to know that the Iranians, particularly the Zoroastrians, have not forgotten the rainy days. They celebrate Tiregan by splashing one another with water and also swimming in ponds, rivers, and the sea. They dance, sing, recite poetry and serve spinach soup and *sholleh zard*. The custom of tying rainbow-colored bands on their wrists, which are worn for ten days and then thrown into a stream, is also a way to rejoice, especially for the children.

As we have seen, common Iranians, including the Zoroastrians, celebrate the holiday but have no knowledge of Tishtrya, the Rain Deity as presented in the Avestan Tir Yasht. They have a faint memory of a historic event that took place in the remote past: The rains that began in the month of Tir, the last week of June on the Iranian Plateau.

What we see is that the common Iranian has his/her folklore in celebrating Tiregan. The legend says that Manuchehr, the great-grandson of Fereydoun, is the first ruler of Iran after the populated lands of the world, all ruled by Fereydoun, were split in three and given to his three sons. The split starts a war between the three sons and their descendants, particularly Iraj, who's descendants are the Iranians, and Turaj, who's descendants are the Turanians, that lasts for centuries. Manuchehr is weakened by the Turanian ruler Afrasiab in a battle, and he proposes that the two have a fixed boundary fixed by an arrow shot by an Iranian archer and enjoy peace. Afrasiab agrees. The great archer chosen is Arash-e Kamangir.

The nobleman accepts the command, although he knows well that the task will cost his life. He goes up on Mount Demavand (just north of modern Tehran in Tabarestan) at dawn and, with all his strength, shoots the arrow and falls dead asunder. The arrow lands on the riverside of the Amu (the Oxus) in Tokharestan, also known as Bactria, at sunset, covering about 3,000 miles. It defines the border of Turan and Iran; Iran in those days included the Iranian Plateau along with the regions of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and parts of Pakistan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia.



What has been detailed above is the general folklore and it has its variations in the writings of the post Sasanian Iranian scholars, Biruni, Gardizi, Masudi, Tabari, Thalebi and others. It is very strange to note that it is only alluded in the Avestan Tir Yasht and the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi. No details given! The Tir Yasht alludes only in stanza 6 that “Tishtrya (Tir) we venerate, who flies fast towards Vouru-Kasha (Wide-Shore) Sea just like the arrow of Erekhsh (Avestan for the Persian Arash), the Archer, the best of Aryan (Iranian) archers.” The Wide-shore Sea could be the Achaemenian “Pars/Persian Sea,” now called as the Arabian Sea or even the Indian Ocean.³

The Shahnameh of 60,000 couplets has only two allusions of the episode and that too one in a half couplet “Tell me, who was the king at the time of Arash?” and the second in the half couplet “Like Arash who shot the arrow for miles” and these two allusions are made during reign of Khosrow Parviz of the Sasanian Dynasty (590-628 CE), more than 2,000 (?) years after Arash.

Whatever the case, the Tiregan Festival is celebrated by the Iranians reminding them of the raining past by the splashing each other with water and the boundary peace by the noble archer, Arash-e Kamangir.

Happy Tiregan to all!

Image sourced from Wikidata ‘greater Iran’ April 11th 2025 for illustrative purposes. – Caleb Goodfellow.

³ The missing Avestan Book ‘Chihرداد’ had a full treatment of the Iranian mythos, where such matters would have been discussed in detail. – CG