# 9th Annual Celebration of Nowruz at UCLA

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## Nowruz at UCLA and the Celebration of Persian Culture

Farhang Foundation celebrated its 9th Annual Nowruz celebrations at UCLA here in LA, USA. Nowruz events took place in Dickson Courts and Royce Hall of UCLA. The Farhang Foundation organized various kinds of activities related to Nowruz. Events and activities held were open to people of different age groups. There were musical performances, traditional Iranian dances, activities for children, costume parades for various age groups and a Haft Sin display. Famous Iranian artist Mohsen Namjoo, with his special guests, performed very beautifully. Iranian traditional dances were carried out by Djanbazian Dance Company and others.

Activities for children included calligraphy, arts and crafts, a photo booth, face painting, storytelling and an Iranian puppet show. Except for Mohsen Namjoo's performance, the rest of the event was free of cost and Iranians and non-Iranians were all welcome to experience the beauty of Iranian culture. I came to know about the event through one of my friends. Also, banners placed in many areas outside UCLA did a good advertisement of the event. The announcement about the events was also made on social media, like Facebook. On Facebook, Iranians were inviting their non-Iranian friends to join them.

The program started at 12:00 PM with the display of Haft Sin; also, the speaker shed light on the meaning and significance behind the Nowruz festival. I listened very carefully to him. So, Nowruz is the name of a celebration that welcomes the New Year in many countries of the world, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and various Central Asian countries. The word Nowruz comes from the Persian language – "Now" is new, and "Ruz" means day, and together it becomes "New Day." It is celebrated on 21st March every year and marks the beginning of the spring season.

Nowruz is a very ancient festival and dates back to the oldest traditions of Iran. The reasons behind the celebration of Nowruz are various. This festival marks a spiritual relation and affection between the creator of the universe and his creations. Furthermore, the departed spirits are said to return to their homes to celebrate Nowruz – this particular rite is celebrated today by a small group of Parsees (community) and Iranians (Bashiri, Iraj) (Michae, Jaclyn).

# Haft Sin, Cultural Diversity, and the Festival Setting

The hall was decorated very beautifully with flowers and green decorative material and was filled with people – not just Iranians, but Americans, Indians, Pakistanis, Afghanis, etc. There was the display of the Grand Haft Sin. An Iranian was sitting there, and I asked him about the Grand Haft Sin – which was a table filled with edibles. That Iranian guy told me that "Haft-Seen Table" means the Table of Seven S's. A haft-seen table is a very traditional ritual of Nowruz day. On Nowruz day, seven things whose names start with the alphabet 'S' are set on the dinner table. A special tablecloth is spread on the table this day, and all of the family members help in doing this. After placing the cloth on the table, seven items with "S" as the first alphabet are put on the table.

These items symbolize particular meanings. For example, "Sumac," which is a spice, symbolizes "sunrise and life"; "Senjed" is a dry fruit, and it expresses love and warmth; Seeb is an Apple, and it symbolizes patience; "Sir" is Garlic, and it symbolizes beauty; "Samanu" is pudding, and it symbolizes health; Sabzeh is green wheat grass, and it symbolizes the fertility of life. Hence, other items starting with the alphabet 'S' can be set on the table.

Other things are also placed on the table, like a bowl full of water with an orange in it, which symbolizes the planet Earth; a mirror symbolizing deeds of the past year; goldfish in a bowl symbolizing life; eggs painted with colors symbolizing fertility; flowers symbolizing spring, coins symbolizing prosperity and lit candles symbolizing happiness in life. Furthermore, more items according to family traditions are also placed on the table (Michae, Jaclyn) (Oloumi, Mehdi).

# Thirteen Days of Nowruz and the Tradition of Sizdeh Bedar

The Haft-seen / table of seven 'S' is set at the house for 13 days from Nowruz day. On the thirteenth day, again, celebrations begin, and this day is called "Sizdeh Bedar" in the Persian language, which means "getting rid of the thirteenth." This day is celebrated outside the house with near and dear ones. People go to various recreational spots and enjoy music, dance, and food. Also, green vegetables are grown for the thirteenth day; people carry these green vegetables with them to picnic spots, and then, these vegetables are thrown into the water or on the ground. It signifies the return of the greenness to nature. This day formally ends the Nowruz festival.

I enjoyed learning about the significance of Grand Haft-seen. My friend and I then moved closer to the table and saw the seven different items. They were looking exquisite to the eyes. I tasted some of the food that was present on the table; it was a sweet dish – and it felt nice.

In the corner of the hall, there was a group of children who seemed to be enjoying themselves. I went

over there to see what was happening; a guy dressed like a typical Iranian was holding a book and reading something. He was telling the kids about Haji Firooz.

## Haji Firooz and the Historical Customs of the New Year

In the early days, the arrival of Nowruz used to be announced by a person named Haji Firooz. Haji Firooz used to have red attire and a painted face. Haji Firooz then had to dance and sing in the streets announcing Nowruz day – that way, people used to know about the arrival of Nowruz. Families and friends then greet each other. Nowruz Mubarak/Happy New Year after Tahvil. After that, sweets and desserts are distributed among the family and friends by the eldest person around. Children are given gifts, and people visit their neighbors with gifts to wish them Nowruz (Price, Massoume).

The kids found Haji Firooz very amusing, and some of them wanted to be like Haji Firoozi. I offered my help with the face painting. My friend and I helped the volunteers paint the faces of the kids. After that, sweets and gifts were distributed among the children. At 3:00 PM, the Iranian Costume parade started on the stage of the Dickson Court. The musicians were playing some music with the help of musical instruments. The participants were wearing colorful dresses and jewelry. Children were also wearing traditional clothes and holding flowers. Men and women were wearing traditional caps and dancing to the music. Other than that, there were various musical programs by singers and dance performances.

There was a Persian Teahouse where Persian food and tea were served. I tried the dish made of vegetables. It had some spices and meat in it, and it was very delicious. I thought of trying the Persian tea as well, but unfortunately, there was no tea left. I regret not going there earlier. Everybody in the room was grooving to the music and enjoying the event. I wanted to stay there and attend the rest of the events, such as the Puppet Show and Mohsen Namjoo’s performance, but I was supposed to finish an assignment. That is why I left the hall and returned home. I am already looking forward to attending this colorful event organized by Farhang.

## Works Cited

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