

## A Report on Mehregan in Sydney 1994

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Migration from one place to another has been one of the oldest phenomena of human history. People are forced out their homes into strange places in search of something better, for a wide range of reasons: because of droughts, floods, volcanoes, wars, pressure from occupying forces or from their own expatriates.

Migration, like many other phenomena, has two faces; a bright face and a dark one. If it were not for migration many nations would still today be living in caves, and sacrificing their children in the fear of thunder or heavy rains. But migrations did take place and people took their cultures to their new homelands; that is how the universal feature of culture, as human heritage, took shape. This is the bright side of migration. The dark side of migration appears when the migrants ignore their original culture, gradually forgetting their own values and losing their own heritage. The loss of cultural identities and self-confidence is the outcome of such ignorance.

Following the events of 1979, a huge wave of unprecedented migration started from Iran, and Iranian expatriates settled in many countries all around the world.

Attempts to safeguard cultural values and national heritage by these Iranians has not widespread and consistent. In such a confusing atmosphere individuals attempt to salvage themselves and re-organise their lives. Parents want their children to integrate into the new culture. Children and even middle-aged people have often been confused as to the directions the directions they should take.

It is the responsibility of individuals and groups to maintain and introduce their own culture to their new homeland to make for a healthier multicultural situation. The Persian Cultural Foundation of Australia (PCFA) was established in Sydney in 1990, to maintain and introduce the Persian culture in Australia.

### **The Persian Cultural Foundation of Australia**

The Persian Cultural Foundation of Australia is a non-government, non-political and non-religious organisation devoted to the introduction and enhancement of Persian culture in Australia. Its specific objectives are as follows:

- . introducing the Persian culture, the most ancient multicultural civilization, to the Australian multicultural society;
- . promoting a better understanding of Persian culture in Australia;
- . enhancing cross-cultural understanding, friendship and harmony amongst the ethnic groups of Australia;
- . encouraging the global recognition of Australia as a patron of culture and arts;
- . providing opportunities for women of the Persian, Assyrian, Afghan, Armenian, Kurd and other ethnic groups to express and experience Persian culture in creative activities;
- . provided opportunities for the youth and children of the Persian, Assyrian, Afghan, Armenian, Kurd and other ethnic groups to express and experience Persian culture in creative activities.

## **The Persian Cultural Foundation of Australia 1990-1994**

- UNESCO announced 1990 as the *Year of Shahnameh*, to commemorate the millennium of its completion. I prepared a series of 52 programs of fifteen minutes each about the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi and Iranian mythology, and these were broadcasted by Radio Payam Pars, Sydney.
- In 1991, I also prepared a series of 52 programs of fifteen minutes each on *Ethic Groups in Multicultural Iran*, and broadcasted them on Radio Payam Pars, Sydney.
- During 1991-1992, I organized 52 programs of three hours each on *Reading, interpreting and discussing Shahnameh* at the Chatswood Community Hall, Sydney.
- The *Mehregan in Sydney*, a one night event on October 1992, was organized by The Persian Cultural Foundation of Australia and celebrated at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. It was a Festival of Iranian Culture at the beginning of the Australian spring. This ceremony was held for over 1000 guests, and exhibited aspects of Armenian, Assyrian, Azarbaijani, Kurdish cultures and other groups within the Persian culture. It was a festival of friendship and happiness, with music, poetry, art exhibitions and dance programmes. This event was opened by Ms Franca Arena. Dr Florian Messner and Dr Morteza Honari were guest speakers at this event.
- The PCFA also organized the *Saddeh Celebration* on 30 January 1993 and the *Esfandegan Celebration* on March 1993 as open air ceremonies of traditional music and dance.

### **Mehregan: Persian Cultural Festival in Sydney, 1994**

The Mehregan Festival of 1992, and the support we received, prepared PCFA for the much greater event of *Mehregan in Sydney in 1994*, for the celebration and introduction of Persian culture in Australia.

After two years of hard work, the participation of hundreds of people and support of a large number of government and non-government organizations, *Mehregan: Festival of Persian Culture in Sydney* became a reality. The official duration of the festival was from 28 October 1994 to 6 November 1994, but some events were extended beyond this time.

#### ***Friday, 28 October 1994, INAUGURATION***

The Persian Cultural Festival, Mehregan, was officially inaugurated at the eve of Friday 28 October 1994 in the Curzon Hall, Sydney, in presence of over 250 guests, eminent persons, artists, scholars, academics and other invitees.

The Hon Michael Photios, MP., Minister for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs; The Hon Franca Arena; and Mr Stepan Karkasharian, Chairman, Ethnic Affairs Commission were the guests of honour; the ceremony was inaugurated by Professor Bastani-Parizi of Tehran University.

The programme started with the national anthem of Australia and Iran, coordinated by Linda Safajou, sing by Bahram Shokrolah-Zadeh. After inauguration speeches by Michael Photios, Franca Arena, and Professor Garry Trompf, the programme continued with the presentations by the Persian Ballet Group and Azarbaijan Music group.

***Saturday, 29 October 1994, PERSIAN ECSTASY***

The Persian Ecstasy Night was celebrated in the Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House in the presence of 2000 guests.

The participants of the programmes were Persian musicians and Artists from Iran, Australia and other countries.

***Sunday 30 October 1994, THE BAS-RELIEF OF CYRUS THE GREAT***

The Bas-Relief of Cyrus the Great, who issued the first Human Rights Declaration, was unveiled in Sydney's Bicentennial Park, Olympic Village, Homebush Bay.

The Bas-Relief sculpture created by the Australian-Assyrian artist Lewis Batros is a replica of the Bas-Relief founded in Pasargad, near Persepolis in Iran.

The front of Cyrus the Great is shown. On the posterior a map of Australia is shown in which the five continents are embedded, and statues of different groups are carved: a Persian, an Egyptian, a Median, a Greek, a Roman, a Chinese dragon, an English Lady, an African, an American, and an Australian Aboriginal at the top.

This occasion was celebrated by special programmes. There were hundreds of people present on this occasion. Professor Bastani-Parizi opened the celebration. Then the Minister for Health and Environment, and Ms Mary Dimech, Multicultural Program Manager, The Australia Council for the Arts gave supportive speeches.

The occasion continued with the freeing of 100 white pigeons, and music and traditional dance.

***Sunday 30 October 1994, THE PERSIAN ARTS EXHIBITION***

This exhibition of Persian paintings, arts and calligraphy was an ongoing exhibition for 20 days at the Manly Arts Gallery. Some of the world famous contemporary Persian artists and calligraphers presented their works.

Professor Mahmood Farshchian, a world renowned Persian painter, and Javad Bakhtiari, world famous Persian calligrapher presented their works in this exhibition.

***Sunday 30 October 1994, THE CHILDRENS' FESTIVAL***

The Childrens' Festival was organised in the Parramatta Town Hall. This educational family event was well received by tens of Persian families in Sydney. The goal of this program was to encourage youths of Iranian backgrounds to become more interested in their cultural roots. Participating students of educational competitions received their prizes from scholars.

***Monday 31 October 1994, THE IRANIAN STUDIES SEMINARS***

A special feature of the Mehregan Festival initiated by the Persian Cultural Foundation was the Iranian Studies Seminars. This was conducted in the Wallace Theatre, with the assistance of the School of Studies in Religion, the University of Sydney.

This seminar continued for five days with 25 scholars from Iran, Australia, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Canada, and the United States presenting their contributions. Australian participants came from Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Townsville.

***Friday 4 November 1994, PERSIAN POETRY NIGHT***

Poetry nights are one of a main attractions in the Persian culture. This was organised in Sydney University Hall. Some 20 poets from Iran and Australia recited their own poetry and discussed issues related to Persian poetry and literature.

***Friday 4 November 1994, CLOSING CEREMONY***

The closing ceremony was conducted at the Supa Centa with the presence of all guests, contributors and participants of the Festival. An overview of the Festival was presented, and supporters of the Mehregan Festival were officially acknowledged.

Recognition of the Mehregan Festival of Sydney was wide spread. The Festival received highest acknowledgment by being reported on and commended by some of the main cultural, academic and literary journals, newspapers, radios and televisions in Iran, Australia, Canada and Europe.

**Acknowledgments**

Mehregan in Sydney was a great cultural festival. It came to a very successful conclusion through the support of many individuals and organizations, and the hard work of hundreds of people. It is impossible to acknowledge all the support that the Persian Cultural Foundation of Australia and the Mehregan Festival received in detail. I am obliged to acknowledge the names of organizations and individuals as much as possible. Yet there were many contributions that were beyond acknowledgment.

**Special gratitude is due to:**

Michael Photios, MP., The Minister for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs accepted to be the Patron of the Festival and gave invaluable support essential to great success of the Festival.

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ABC Radio.

SBS Radio.

SBS Youth Orchestra.

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Master Lewis Betros

Professor Mahmud Farshchian

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|-------------------------|-------------------------|
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I hope this is accepted in the presence of both the multicultural Australia and the Iranian culture.