

## A Report on Mehregan in Sydney 1994

*Homer Abramian*  
 Director, The Persian Cultural  
 Foundation of Australia

*translated by Morteza and Omid Honari*

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.

Ms Franca Arena, MP., for her continuous support throughout the Festival and beyond. The Department of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs for their financial, technical and moral support.

The Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales and its Chairperson Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian for the continuing support in development and implementation of the project.

The Australia Council for the Arts, and especially to Ms Mary Dimech for the active involvement throughout the Festival, in particular in regard to the establishment of the Bas-Relief of Cyrus the Great in the Olympic Park.

The University of Sydney for providing the special grant, for the organisation of the Iranian Studies Seminar and for the valuable time of Professor Garry Trompf for editing this book and publishing it.

The University of Newcastle for the valuable time of Dr Morteza Honari in the huge task of editing, translating, and organising this book for publication.

The Department of Immigration, and especially to Ms Virginia Sutton for facilitating visa for the guest and participants in the Festival and the Seminar.

The Australian Embassy in Tehran.

Avaye Iran 24-hour Persian Radio.

ABC Radio.

SBS Radio.

SBS Youth Orchestra.

**Special thanks to the participants of the Iranian Studies Seminars, and to:**

Master Javad Bakhtiari

Master Lewis Betros

Professor Mahmud Farshchian

**Special thanks to the following organizations and people for their financial support:**

The Department of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs which provided a \$15,000 grant for the organisation the Festival.

The University of Sydney provided a \$5,000 grant to the Festival and great support for organisation of the Iranian Studies Seminars.

The Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales and its Chairperson Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian.

The Australia Council for the Arts.

The International College of Spain, Madrid, and its Director Mr Manuchehr Farhangi for the financial support and providing expenses of the Bas-Relief of Cyrus the Great.

The Persian Carpet Gallery, and its Director Mr Homayun Faeghi for its financial support.

Iranian Cultural and Educational Society, and specially My Minbashian, for re-bilding the base of the Bas-Relief

Barvo Travel, especially to Mr Maleki.

Homa Travel, especially to Mr Mehdi-Zadeh.

**Special thanks to the following people for their financial support:**

- |                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| . Ms Fakh-Taj Bastani  | . Mr Mohsen Bastani-Rad |
| . Ms Nasrin Derakhshan | . Mr Behruz Ehsani      |
| . Mr Homayun Faeghi    | . Mr Manuchehr Farhangi |
| . Mr Habib Hayeri      | . Mr Jalal Jalili       |
| . Mr Jalil Jalili      | . Ms Shahla Jalili      |
| . Mr Yusof Jalil-Zadeh | . Mr Akbar Jeyran-Pour  |
| . Ms Mehravar Kaboli   | . Mr Hashem Kamal       |
| . Mr Hormoz Kamal      | . Mr Ehsan Keyhani      |
| . Mr Jamshid Khojaini  | . Dr Kurosh Parsi       |
| . Ms Linda Safajou     | . Mr Hasan Sagvand      |
| . Ms Lili Sheybani.    | . Mr Hushang Vafa       |

**Special gratitude to the organizing groups:**

- |                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| . Ms Firuzeh Abidi          | . Ms Carmen Abramian     |
| . Ms Udet Abramian          | . Ms Shamiram Abramian   |
| . Mr Jamshid Adili          | . Mr Behruz Assemi       |
| . Mr Mohsen Bastani-Rad     | . Mr Farhad Daneshgar    |
| . Mr Masud Doosti           | . Mr Behruz Ehsani       |
| . Mr Hushmand Ehsani        | . Ms Mehrasa Farjad      |
| . Ms Violet Forutan         | . Ms Susan Ghaemi        |
| . Ms Bolbol Gharib-Aveh     | . Mr Asad Hafshajani     |
| . Ms Atena Hafshajani       | . Ms Mohtaram Hafshajani |
| . Ms Farzaneh Homayun       | . Ms Mehravar Kaboli     |
| . Mr Hashem Kamal           | . Mr Hormoz Kamal        |
| . Ms Molud Kana'ni          | . Ms Artimis Keyhani     |
| . Ms Parmis Keyhani         | . Ms Ghazaleh Liari      |
| . Mr Fariborz Mansuri       | . Mr Bahman Marzbani     |
| . Ms Azin Meshkat           | . Ms Elham Meshkat       |
| . Ms Shohreh Meshkat        | . Ms Juli Miller         |
| . Mr Shahram Momeni         | . Ms Anna Nolan          |
| . Ms Shahla Pad             | . Dr Kurosh Parsi        |
| . Mr Fariborz Rahnemun      | . Ms Fereshteh Sadeghi   |
| . Ms Linda Safajou          | . Ms Fataneh Sagvand     |
| . Mr Belash Salamati-Bakhsh | . Mr Farzad Sanaei       |
| . Ms Janet Sarkisian        | . Ms Fereshteh Shalbaf   |
| . Mr Bahram Shokrolah-Zadeh | . Ms Foruzan Shirazi     |
| . Ms Nancy Sibtain          | . Ms Nahid Ziarati       |

**And the last, but not the least, I have to express my gratitude:**

To Professor Garry Trompf for his constant support throughout the Festival and Seminar, and for his contribution towards editing and publishing of this book;

To Dr Morteza Honari for his contribution towards editing, translating and organizing this book;

To Ms Pirayeh Yaghmaii for her late effort in accepting my request in researching and preparing a paper on *Mehr* and *Mehregan*, and her assistance in translating some of the papers; along with Mr Omid Honari, who put unconditional effort into transcribing and assisting in the translation of some presentations.

To the funding bodies who have made the publication of the book possible as the first in the series Sydney Studies in Religion, these being the Scotow Bequest, the Gift Bequest of the American Zoroastrian Community (valued Australian representative Mehravar Kaboli), and the Theosophical Society of Australia. Joshua Fry of the University of Sydney Printing Service was conscientious and very generous with his time. Dr Gerd Gropp and Professor Richard Frye kindly helped with the proofreading; Margaret Gilet with the typing and the University of Sydney Arts Computing Centre with the accessing of unusual disks.

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