

Ashaglān

Tajik culture has rich and ancient ceremonies and beliefs associated closely with the natural world. When there is a need for a supernatural intervention people have devised a ceremony and ritual, which enabled them to ask gods for assistance and intervention. One of such rituals (ceremony) that is performed during the draught; ritual for calling the rain is «Ashaglān». In different parts of Tajikistan this ritual is called by different names, for example in Khatolon province and Rasht valley it is called «ashaglān» whereas in Hisar valley and Sughd province it is known as «Sus-khotun», «Chilla-khotun», «Yalkon-khotun» and «Tuyi sus-khotun».

Ashaglān ceremony is celebrated by the advice of the council of elders of the community that is when it is needed. On a chosen date a woman is decorated to represent ashaglon, putting in her old loose clothing normally worn by old ladies. Then the lady holds her arms up lifting above her head a puppet. The puppet's head is covered by a headscarf. The puppet transformed into Ashaglān is then accompanied by women and taken from house to house and water is sprinkled in her as it is moved. The women crowding ashaglon will sing, clap and dance during the procession. When ashaglon's procession is going a song dedicated to her is sung which is:

O true Ashaglān
Shake your sleeves gently
My green pastures have dried out
Once again pour the rain
I have a brother who is farmer
I have desire for rain

In the regions where Ashaglān is known as «Sus-khotun» the following song is performed:

Sus-khotun hoy sus-khotun
Make the rain pour fast
Pour the rain drop by drop
Nourish the earth with water
Make the grain grow in abundance
Birds are left thirsty
Farmer women left hungry

As the procession goes loud singing is heard across the village and everyone comes out to splash water on ashaglon's face. People go up their roofs to observe the procession and all join in asking and calling for the rain.

Ashaglān procession has an officiator who is rewarded as he takes the ashaglon from house to house; usually people give him grain products i.e. wheat, beans etc.

Every household who receives the ashaglon in his or her home must splash its face with water and give grain product to the officiator. As the procession moves from one house to another people keep joining the procession sometimes

reaching the amount of the whole villagers and can navigate from one village to another as well. It is very festive ritual and people go splashing water on one another in celebratory mood.

After the procession ends women gather in one house and cook dishes with the grain products, such as *gandumkucha* (soup with wheat) or noodle soup with grains and the food is distributed as alms to everyone passing by or among the villagers themselves.



