**When the Main Buryat Holiday Emerged**

It is believed that Sagaalgan is not younger than eight hundred years, and, despite its antiquity, many of its most interesting traditions are still revered on the coast of Baikal.

The origin of the name does not cause any disputes. It is directly related to the Mongolian roots, and means literally “Tsagaan” – white and “sar” – month. That is why in ancient times the pronunciation of the holiday was slightly different – “Tsagan Sar” or “Sagan Sar”. Initially the holiday was meant to celebrate milk, “white” food, valued by the people living in the steppe; and the holiday was celebrated in the autumn. This was explained by the peculiarity of the way life of nomadic cattle-breeding tribes and their perception of the calendar cycle. Autumn was the end of the preparation of dairy stocks, cattle bringing litter, whereas cattle were the main source of subsistence for the Mongols. There was no tradition of an individual birthday. So during this holiday the Mongols and Buryats simply added a year of age to each of themselves and to the cattle.

The distribution of Buddhism brought seasonal changes, and since then Sagaalgan has been celebrated at the end of winter. People in Buryatia say that, basically, it is the holiday of adherents of Lamaism, reflecting the ancient traditions and rituals of paganism and shamanism of the Mongolian and Turkic tribes. The fall of the great Mongolian empire returned the Mongols and their holiday back within the borders of their country. The name “white” stopped to be understood literally as something related to dairy food, but has acquired a different universal meaning. For Mongolian peoples white color was and still is a symbol of holiness and purity, the source of happiness and well-being.

The gradual “advance” of Lamaism to other countries added the holiday to the culture and life of their peoples, including Buryats.

The undoubted advantage of the holiday is the fact that it lasts for an entire month. Such a period, of course, was not chosen by accident. The yurts of nomads were situated far from each other. To move from one yurt to another, people sometimes needed more than one day, and then they also had to participate in the festive dinner and rites in each dwelling.

According to the belief of the Buryats, a decent greeting of New Year will help improve the health, longevity of all family members, material wealth. And the main thing is to celebrate Sagaalgan without any offense, envy, anger, only with a pure soul and a heart free from negative emotions.

Thus, during this holiday, people congratulate each other, saying good words, giving presents, exchanging treats. In the olden days, a tradition emerged: people did their best to present gifts of white color: clothes, utensils, fabrics, and tableware.