

Fragrant drops of rosewater



Lakshmi Kothaneth
@lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

The season of Damask roses on Jabal al Akhdhar closes by mid May. The Green Mountain turns pink during April and May and one can imagine how wonderful it would be to inhale the fragrance rich air! Of course now we can wait for the traditionally distilled rose water to reach the markets or take the winding road up the

mountain and enjoy the cool day while fetching the rose water bottles. In every culture there is a special place for rose water and its usage goes way back in time.

My first memory of rose water was while attending a wedding ceremony in India as a child when I was sprinkled with rose water and sandalwood paste at the entrance.

Love playing with water but this one smelled nice too. It makes you smile naturally. And the rose water sprinkler stayed on my mind forever.

Covering an event at Oman National Museum gave an opportunity to linger around and admire some of the exquisite collections and guess what was on display? Delicately sitting under the small spotlight that enhanced the carved designs was a silver rosewater sprinkler (mirasshah) from northern Oman from 14th c AH/20th c CE. The

square showcase underneath contained a beautiful white colour rosewater sprinkler with small magenta flowers at the base. The description said, "Iran - (painted glass) and Sur, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate (silver decoration) 13th - 14th c AH/19th - 20th c CE. This was under the category of cross-cultural connections - Rosewater.

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While talking about the rosewater, my friend said in Syria too it was an old tradition to sprinkle rosewater and was done so for good luck. Remember going through an exhibition of consumer products a few years ago in the Sultanate of Oman, my friend from Iran and I were walking and an exhibitor wanted us to sample his rosewater and was disappointed when I could not hold the water in my palm. I had dropped most of it (I had thought he was just going to sprinkle it).

He was from Iran - a land known for its rosewater- and he had special pride when it came to his collection of rosewater. He demonstrated as he said, "See, how your friend held the water." I cupped my palm too and there was this beautifully smelling water in my palm - "Now you can splash it on your face," he said.

Who cares for make-up when there is rosewater?

Splash it and the impact is amazing! One looks at the world differently.

Maybe today we do not keep rosewater sprinklers, but the distilled rosewater sprays for face continue to charm.

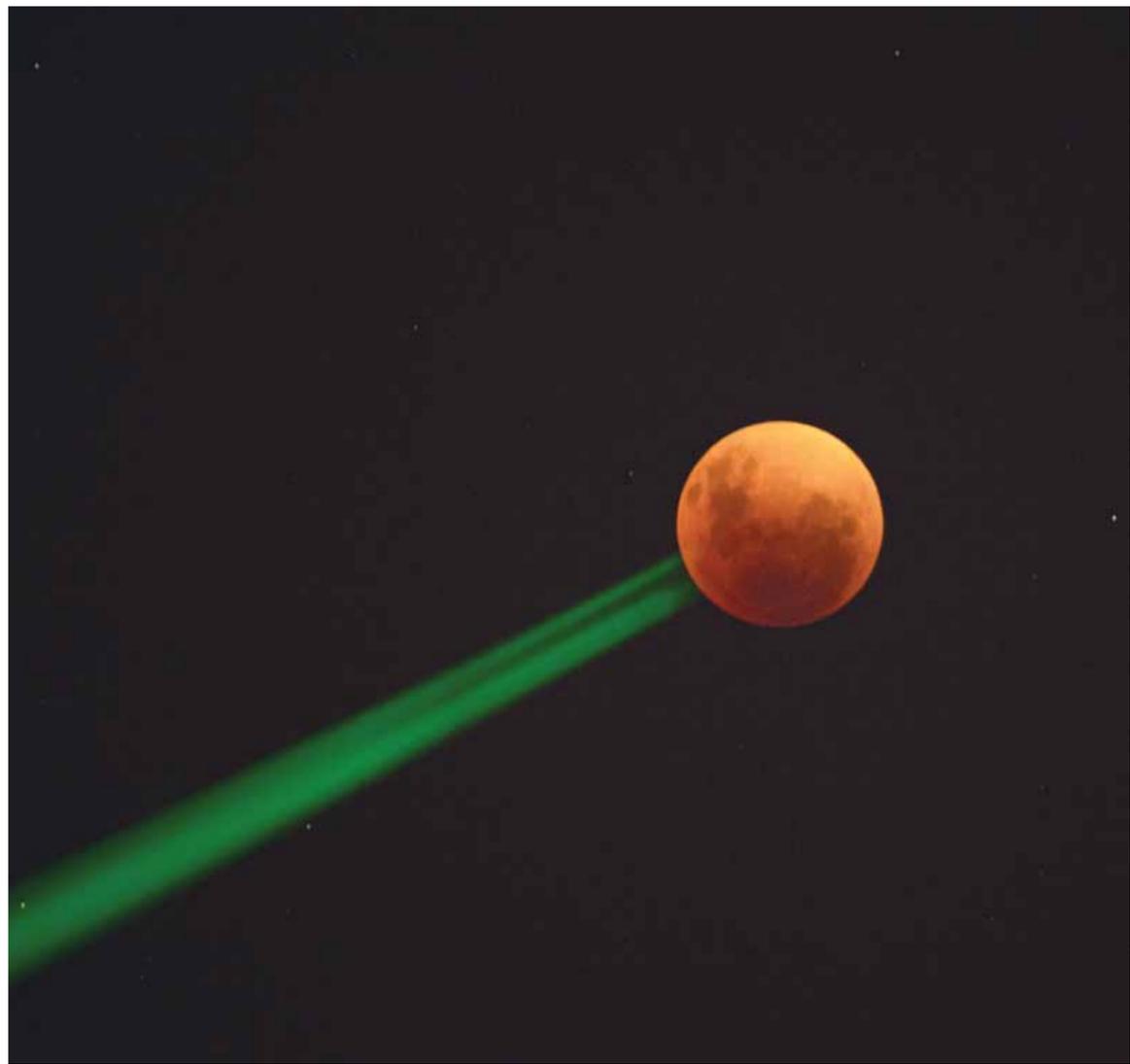
Traditions also meant washing eyes with rosewater while tackling summer heat. Yes, rosewater was also used for its medicinal properties and is known for its benefits for the skin.

But most importantly of course rosewater is an important ingredient in many cuisines especially desserts and one will definitely sense it when enjoying Baklava and not to forget gulab jamoon. Who can forget the sweet taste of rosemilk? The Middle East and Asia have celebrated the roses. The rosewater was also used in medieval Europe as well.

Growing up a little bit more I realised the rosewater sprinkler is a household item and was very much at home too and is used for special occasions. Soon it became a fun thing to do sprinkling rosewater on people, no matter how serious people were, they smiled when the drops fell on them.

Of course the fragrant water was not only cooling but refreshing.

It is about time we brought back rosewater into our lives and the rosewater sprinklers ushering in fragrant raindrops not just for sweet memories but for a bright future!



THE BLOOD MOON

The blood moon is seen during a total lunar eclipse in Santiago, Chile, on Sunday. - AFP

The power of cultural diplomacy



Sultan al Bimani
sultan.albimani@hotmail.com
@sultan5albimani

The present struggle against global terrorism is a struggle to win minds and hearts, and the current over-reliance on hard power alone is not the way to success. (Nye J, 2004) states that public diplomacy is a crucial tool in the arsenal of smart power, however smart public diplomacy involves an understanding of the roles of self-criticism, civil society, and credibility in generating "soft power".

While the soft power of a country rests on its policies, values and culture resources.

The distribution of cultures in the world reflects the distribution of power. Trade may or may not follow the flag, but culture almost always follows power.

Throughout history the expansion of the power of a civilisation has usually occurred simultaneously with the following of its culture and has almost always involved its using that power to extend its value, practices, and institutions to other societies (Huntington, 2011).

A universal civilisation requires universal power. And as (Nye J, 2004) stated that culture and ideology are attractive, others will be more willing to follow.

And hence soft power is just as important as hard command power. These culture and ideology become attractive when they are seen as rooted in material success and influence.

They play a critical role in the diplomacy as much as in the domestic politics.

The presence of culture abroad is linking to the level of care and attention inside the country.

Thus, it is an effective tool for countries to achieve tangible and intangible benefits from abroad (Schreiber, 2017).

By providing cultural industries, ensuring their resources and gaining the appropriate image and the desired reputation.

And with the condition if there is compatibility and proportionality between Cultural Policy and Public Policy.

Art is one type of culture that can be instrumental in shaping the nature and tone of cultural diplomacy.

It can create a unique space for artists, audiences, and other stakeholders in cultural management to come together

on a neutral platform.

Despite this art influence, the use of art to raise awareness of different cultures, promote social cohesion, and strengthen intercultural relations.

Cultural diplomacy is a bridge between nations to provide a powerful tool that can be used to raise the awareness and understanding of issues (Diplomacy, 2010).

In addition, "building relationships" is one of three dimensions of public diplomacy for each government. It depends on earning high levels of trust, creating a neutral and safe environment, and can often best be done at one remove from government (Leonard, 2002).

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It is also one of the most effective tools for developing lasting cultural relationships.

For examples, countries create teaching and exchange programmes such as scholarships and visits and invite people from overseas in order to participate in these international programmes throughout the country. These exchange programmes have a great positive effort in human and cultural exchanges as well as an excellent deal of network building and follow-up.

(Nye J, 2004) makes this point eloquently: It is not that the student goes back converted but they go back with a much more sophisticated idea of our

strengths and weaknesses.

Through this building cultural relationships, countries attempt to ensure that the experiences which students or participants take away with them are positive and that there is a follow-up. This type of relationships is completely different from selling messages because it includes a genuine.

The best example of relationship building is the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme.

It invites young graduates from overseas universities and colleges to participate in international exchange and foreign language education throughout Japan (Leonard, 2002).

In 1936, Washington started its government-sponsored exchange of culture between United States and the Latin American nations. Then in 1938, United States used the culture as an element in its international relationship building by supervising America's educational and cultural exchange programmes in Latin America (Pells, 1997).

Historically, France, predictably, was the first country to utilise its culture for international goals.

After its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the French government sought to repair the nation's shattered prestige by teaching the French literature and language in the colonies and elsewhere, creating the Alliance Française for this purpose in 1883.

In the 1930s, the idea of how culture might be made a tool of foreign policy did exist overseas by some countries, while United States remained oblivious (Pells, 1997).

Another example is Berlin's International Festival "Berlinale" which was started in 1951 by the US military as a propaganda and an effective tool to strive for soft power.

After World War II, Berlin was divided into sectors controlled by the allies and the front of the cold war.

The Americans were wanting to bring a touch of Hollywood glamour to their west Berlin sector, invited huge stars of the time for this festival which would be known as "showcase of the free world". Berlinale survived after the fall of Berlin Wall and became one of the world's most respected festivals.