

THE PARSEE VOICE

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SERIOUS CRISIS BREWING AT DADYSETH *ATASH BEHRAM*

TRUSTEES OUT TO DESTROY ITS SANCTITY!

*"If Wrong You Do, And False You Play,
In Summer Among The Bowers,
You Shall Repent, You Will Repay,
In Winter Among The Showers!"*

The oldest **Atash Behram** of Mumbai, just 58 years younger than the Bhikha Behram well! Built by Dadibhai Nusserwanji in 1783, and consecrated by the then saintly **Kadmi** Dastur, Mulla Kaus Rustom Jalal, assisted by his equally illustrious son, Dastur Mulla Firoz, the Holy Dadyseth Atash Behram is the most unique **Atash Behram**, not only in Mumbai, but perhaps in the whole of India, barring the Iranshah!

It is the only Fire Temple, before the construction of which, the **Tānā** ceremony, which is normally performed while constructing a **Dakhma**, was specially performed. This is the right method, although in Zoroastrian Iran of yore, such a method was not employed. That is, because, in a land where different communities bury their dead, the earth gets polluted, and the **Tānā** ceremony helps reduce the pollution.

Again, this is probably the only **Atash Behram**, in the *Koh (sanctum sanctorum)* of which, below the flooring, were placed special copper charms or amulets and coins by the two great Dasturs, Mulla Kaus and Mulla Firoz, for the enhancement of the spiritual strength and power of the **Atash Padshah**.

Mulla Firoz's Tribute

On the front facade of the **Atash Behram**, the High Priest, Dastur Mulla Firoz's, couplets are inscribed in Persian. Extracts: "Dadi of good times, belonging in this incarnation to Noshirwan, made this hallowed place for worship, according to the traditions of the Good Religion. The sapling of religious tradition, therefore, has become refreshed, and the Good Religion became famous a second time... Because of the efforts of wise Dastur Kaus, this benevolent place has been made ready."

Many a legend has been narrated about the spiritual status of Mulla Kaus. For example, both father and son Firoz had accompanied a caravan to Iran. They went on horseback or by foot. The caravan comprised mostly of Muslim aristocrats. One day, the daughter of the caravan's leader fell seriously ill. All the **hakims** and doctors in the caravan couldn't succeed in curing her. It was left to Dastur Kaus to cure her through his spiritual powers! "Mulla", it is said, was the title bestowed on him and his son, by the grateful Muslims.

Dastur Mulla Firoz was a literary giant and a Persian poet of the first order. His Persian

Munājāts, particularly the one in honour of **Holy Prophet Zarthosht** is recited to this day!

The Building Across

About fifty to sixty feet across, the building to house the *mobeds* and *boiwallas* was constructed. Right in the beginning, it was reported to have a one-storeyed structure, but soon, a second floor was deemed necessary. **It was here that the pious Dastur Mulla Firoz lived and had his well-known library.** The rare and unique collection of books and manuscripts formed a part of Mulla Firoz's library. Many decades later, when the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute came up in the Fort, the Mulla Firoz library was shifted there, where it still exists.

This two-storeyed solid heritage structure has remarkably withstood the vicissitudes of time. Today, there are seven families residing in this historic building, which has seen illustrious residents in the past, in the form of practising priests and *boiwallas*, who were pious paragons of ritual purity.

The Present Crisis

Our whole purpose in bringing this subject with great urgency, is that, today, this heritage structure, alongwith the other indispensable adjuncts of holy Dadyseth Atash Behram, are in grave danger of being demolished (read, vandalised), not by any outsider, nor by the vagaries of Nature, but by those Parsees, who are supposed to preserve, maintain and manage these institutions, namely the trustees of the Dadyseth Charity Trusts!! This to put it mildly, is very shameful! In the last two-three decades, the trustees of some of our Agiaries and Atash Behrams have started taking advantage of the extra FSI and TDR, released by the Government of Maharashtra. Any building in the compound of a Fire Temple, is sought to be demolished on the plea that it is in a state of disrepair. Tenants are promised flats in the new high-rise that would come up in its place.

If the matter goes to a judicial authority, a totally lame excuse is trotted out by the trustees, that they have no funds for the upkeep of the Fire Temple! By constructing a new building, where will they get the money from?

So, a relatively new breed of "developers," again Parsees, undertake to give a lump sum amount, running into a couple of crores to the trustees which has to be used for the maintenance of the Fire Temple. Such convenient cliques between the trustees and the builders are being formed from time to time!

No one bothers to ask the trustees of the Fire Temple, if sufficient and diligent efforts have been made by the trustees to appeal to the Parsee community for donations.

Ten Years Ago...

Coming to the specifics about the Dadyseth **Atash Behram** crisis, about ten years ago, in 1993, the then trustees of the **Atash Behram** wanted to carry out construction/development activities on the trust properties around the **Atash Behram**. Two vigilant Parsee gentlemen filed an application for an injunction order, with the Charity Commissioner. But thereafter, the scheme of construction/development was given up by the trustees themselves and there was a change in the Board of Trustees.

In an Application to the Hon. Charity Commissioner, the trustees had stated: "The Respondents herein have assured the Applicants that for the present there is no move to undertake any other construction/development activity at the said Trust property at Fanaswadi, Mumbai. In case, in future the Trustees find it necessary to undertake any such activity for the benefit of the members of the Parsi community they will follow the procedure laid down in BPT Act 1950 and obtain the prior permission of the Hon'ble Charity Commissioner."

After ten years, what justification do the trustees have to say that now they "find it **necessary(?)** to

undertake" any developmental work? Are the trustees of the Dadyseth Charity Trust interested in construction activity or administering and maintaining the exalted religious institution, as they are duty-bound to do?

Enter Shapoorji Pallonji & Co. Ltd.

Two years ago, the Managing Trustee of the Dadyseth Charity Trust, Mr. Ratan Lalkaka and the famous multi-millionaire father-son duo, Pallonji and Shapoor Mistry agreed to do away with the present "Dadyseth House", and build in its place a 7/8-storey building, which will have nearly 70 flats.

In July 2002, your Editor and Mr. Viraf N. Chiniwala met both Pallonji and Shapoor at their office and did their best to dissuade them from going ahead with their plans. A few months later, signatures of more than 200 Parsees were sent, strongly objecting to the demolition of the heritage building, to both the trustees and to Mr. Pallonji Mistry. There was no response from either!

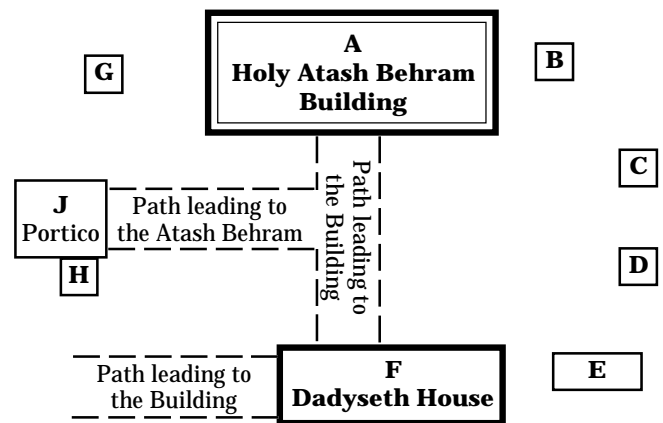
What truly amazes us is that the founder of the Shapoorji Pallonji empire, the late Shapoorji was a staunch devotee of the Dadyseth Atash Behram and visited it almost every day! The fortune that came his way, he believed, was because of the blessings of this Atash Padshah! What is even more astounding is that the present scions themselves, particularly Pallonji, visit the Atash Behram about twice a month, as the permanent *Machis* have been booked in their names! If, today, Mr. Pallonji S. Mistry is among the 500 richest men in the world, he, at least, must be knowing in his heart of hearts that he owes this status to the Dadyseth Atash Behram, in no small measure! If the ostensible purpose of constructing a new building is to generate income for the maintenance of the Atash Behram, the Mistris can straightway donate a few lacs! If they think they are going to help the middle-class Parsees have a roof over their heads, they are sadly mistaken! For, how many such Parsees can shell out lakhs of rupees?

If, again, these flats are supposed to be taken up by wealthy NRI or Indian Parsees, how many will come forward to live in an over-congested, polluted place like Chira Bazar?

There are lands available elsewhere for Pallonji and Shapoor to build homes for members of their community. Why, then, do they want to vitiate the sanctity and the peaceful environs of the Dadyseth Atash Behram?

In spite of all this, the trustees want to destroy the sanctity and the spiritual ambience of the 221-year-old **Atash Padshah!!!**

How they intend carrying out this sacrilegious act is best demonstrated in the following rough sketch:



Key to the sketch:

A : The Atash Behram

B : The structure specially built, in case the holy Padshah may have to be shifted in future. **THIS WILL GO!**

C : The Katila family cabin, where now the Varasiaji is housed. **THIS WILL GO!**

D : The **Gospand** pan, where small **Gospands** like goats are kept. **THIS WILL GO!**

E : The **Bareshnum Gāh**, a consecrated place and a vital adjunct of the **Atash Behram**, where, in the recent past, **Mobeds** used to undergo the 9-nights ablution. **THIS WILL GO!**

F : The present two-storeyed, heritage building, **which will be demolished**, to be replaced by a 7/8-storeyed structure with nearly 70 flats!!

G : The building which originally housed a Dādghah.

H : The Water "**Parab**" used for the performance of the **Kusti-Pādyāb** ritual. **THIS WILL GO!**

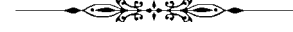
J : The Porch in front of the complex, where we enter from, and where the "sukhadwalla" sits. **THIS WILL GO!**

Then what remains? You may well ask! The **Atash Behram** building, minus its vital, indispensable adjuncts! This building itself will be virtually **gheraoed** by car parks and garages, for all those filthy-rich owners of the new flats!!

There will be a new entrance to the **Atash Behram!** The founder of the Shapoorji Pallonji empire, the late Shapoorji, would never have even dreamt that

the Atash Behram trustees would go all out to demolish, not just the Dadseth House, but the sanctity and piety of the environs, the very spiritual ambience and tranquility of the place. We repeat that the late Shapoorji, the pioneer, was able to build his empire because of the blessings of this Holy **Atash Padshah**. We, therefore, once again urge all of them to desist from hitting at the very foundation of the **Atash Padshah**.

The Parsee Voice earnestly appeals to the Parsee community to rise to a man, and stop this naked vandalism by some members of its own community! Lodge your protests by whatever legitimate means possible and give us all your support in preventing the Atash Behram and its adjuncts from being completely ruined! As this issue goes to the press, soil-testing has already begun in the *Bareshnum-Gah!* High time all faithfuls woke up!



દાદીશેઠનાં પાક આતશબહેરામ પર તોળાટો જબરજસ્ત ભય!

આતશ પાદશાહની સામેનું “દાદીશેઠ હાઉસ” અને તેની આસપાસનાં બરશનુમગાહ, વરસ્યાજનું મકાન અને સંકટમાં પાદશાહને ખસેડવાનું મકાન, જમીનદોસ્ત કરી, ત્યાં આગળ ૭/૮ માળનું આધુનિક મકાન બંધાશે, જેમાં લગભગ ૭૦ ફ્લેટો આવશે, “કાર પાર્કો” અને ગેરાજો આવશે!

અમારા ઉસ્તાદ સાહેબ એક લીટી ચાલુ બોલ્યા કરતા હતા: “જે હસી હસીને કરશે, તે રડી રડીને ભોગવશે!”

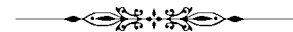
અમારા આજના અંગ્રેજી વિભાગમાં અમોએ દાદીશેઠનાં પાક આતશ પાદશાહ પર કેવા પ્રકારની તવાઈ આવવાની છે, તેની વિસ્તારીને રજૂઆત કરી છે. આતશબહેરામનાં ટ્રસ્ટીઓએ આ ગેરરાદી અને ગેરકાયદેસર ભાંગફોડ અને તોડફોડનો પ્લાન બનાવેલો છે.

જ્યારે આપણીજ કોમનાં ભાઈઓ આ સર્વેથી પુરાતન મુંબઈનાં આતશ પાદશાહ સાથે ચેડાં કાઢે, ત્યારે પેલી કહેતી યાદ આવે છે

કે “ઘર ફૂટે ઘર જાય”! પારસી કોમે આવા અધર્મી કાર્યની સામે સખત વાંધો ઉઠાવી આ કામ અટકાવવું જોઈએ.

અમો માનવંત દસ્તુરજી સાહેબો અને તમામ પંથોનાં મોબેદ સાહેબોને અર્જ કર્યે છીએ કે તેઓ આ આતશબહેરામ નાં ટ્રસ્ટીઓ અને શ્રીમંત શેઠચાઓ પાલનજી અને શાપૂરજી ને સમજાવી આ કામ નહિં કરવાને, વિનવે!

ખુદા પાક સૌને નેક બુદ્ધિ બપક્ષે!



Readers are requested to note that our Post Bag at Delisle Road Post Office has been closed.

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