

# THE PARSEE VOICE

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## WANTON DESTRUCTION OF OUR FIRE TEMPLES!

### IGNORANCE IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL !!

Have some Parsees, really gone over the top, that they want to knock down the very branch on which they are sitting? Don't they realise that they and their ancestors have survived all trials, tribulations and vicissitudes for more than 1200 years in India, that they have even flourished and triumphed and kept their heads bobbing above the waves of the vast sea of humanity for 12 centuries, **only, and only** because of those powerful, highly sensitive Spiritual Receiving and Transmitting Stations, called **Atash Behrams** and **Adarans**?

We are reliably informed that some Parsee builders with roving eyes have trained their sights on the FSI potential available at some of our Fire Temples! **Fifteen hundred years ago, the fanatic Arabs wantonly destroyed thousands of Atash Behrams and Adarans towards the end of the Sassanian Empire. Fatāh al Fatāh! was the war-cry. Today, some rapacious Zoroastrian trustees of our religious institutions and their counterpart builders are doing with a finesse, what the Arabs did crudely!**

#### Who's At Fault? :

All of us. **Behdins** and **Athornans**, for different reasons: they may want a posh flat to live in; those who survive in transit camps, may think that they will have a roof over their heads – their very own flats. (Poor chaps don't realise that all these new ownership flats would be out of their reach!) But the reason of reasons for the Parsees of Mumbai, at least, being callously indifferent to the goings-on

at different Fire Temples is, **IGNORANCE**. Ignorance about who, not what, is an **Atash Padshah**! They think of the **Atash Padshah** only when **they** have to ask for favours!

Although this is not an exclusive religious journal, we give below briefly who an **Atash Padshah** is.

In the **Atash Nyaish** itself, we call him:

- (1) a **Mazishta Yazata** = the greatest Yazad.
- (2) a **Spenta Ratheshtar** = benevolent Spiritual Warrior;
- (3) **Atarsh Puthra Ahurahe Mazdāo** = (Consecrated) Fire, the Son of God.

The consecration of an **Atash Behram Padshah** (Spiritual Monarch) is an elaborate, complex and laborious process. It takes almost 3.5 years to complete the entire procedure of enthroning an **Atash Behram**!

**Atash Behrams** are living, pulsating **Entities**, having an **Aura (Khoreh)**, magnetic circuits (**Kash**) and they act as Receiving and Transmitting Centres. They receive the Divine Blessings of Ahura Mazda, **Ameshaspands** and **Yazads**, which they pass on to those fortunate devotees, who go to them observing Zoroastrian disciplines, with offerings of Sandalwood and prayers.

They transmit the vibrations of the tens of **Atash Nyaishes**, that are recited daily by the devotees before them, as well as their genuine wishes and supplications, to the Spiritual Realms.

These **Atash Padshahs** radiate Divine Energy over long distance.

Hence, you will find that our ancestors, who enthroned these Holy Fires, went to extremes to ensure that their piety and sanctity were established and maintained!

### **Mumbai Atash Behrams**

In Mumbai, for example, where there are four **Atash Behrams**, two **Kadmi** and two **Shehanshai**, in three of them, **considerable care has been taken to see that the building housing the sacred Fire is at a distance from the road and from the general traffic of humans! Thus, except for the Anjuman Atash Behram, the three remaining Fire Temples have big compounds, so that the Atash Padshah is segregated from the outside world!**

Yet, today, in this topsy-turveyed world, there are specimens who cite the example only of Anjuman **Atash Behram**, which stands plumb on the road, surrounded by different buildings. This **Atash Behram** was built in 1897, from funds raised by the Parsee Anjuman. However, its history is steeped in controversy. The original plan was to build just a **Dar-e-Meher**, where priests of the **Bhagariya** sect could practise. It so happened that large surplus funds remained. So, it was decided to construct an **Atash Behram**, at the spot, just a short distance away from the **Wadiaji** Fire Temple. **Our purpose in mentioning this is that the Anjuman Atash Behram cannot be taken into reckoning at all, as it is a lone exception where strict rules of *tariqat* could not be enforced!**

### **What Constitutes an Adaran/Atash Behram?**

Many Parsees are blissfully oblivious of the exact nomenclature of an **Adaran/Atash Behram**: whether the name is given only to the **sanctum sanctorum** (the *koh* or the *Gumbaz*) or whether the whole building is an **Adaran** or an **Atash Behram**. Until recently, everyone just took for granted the whole building as such. But then, some Parsee legal eagles tried to pull a fast one by asserting that only the **Gumbaz** area can be called an **Adaran** or an **Atash Behram**. So, let the late scholar priest Ervad Dr. Jivanji J. Modi enlighten us : "The **building** is spoken of generally as the **Ātash Behram** or the **Ātash Ādaran**, accordingly as it contains the fire of the first or the second grade." That should settle the matter once and for

all, particularly when FSI hungry hawks want to exploit every centimetre of the territory!

### **Scriptural Evidence For The Surroundings Of Fire Temples**

Today, when Parsee builders think of nothing, while constructing sky-scrapers bang next to the Fire Temples, where, as we have shown above briefly, a Spiritual Monarch sits on his Throne, it is pertinent to note that one of the oldest scriptures, the **Vendidad**, has very categorical injunctions about the **minimum distance** a consecrated Fire should be kept from different kinds of putridities.

For example, according to **Vendidad**, Chap. 16, para. 4, Fire should be at least at a distance of 15 paces from a menstrual woman. [A "pace" is about 3.5 feet, which means in this case, at least 52 feet away!] So also, according to Chap.5.48 of the **Vendidad**, a parturating woman, (one who has given birth to a baby) should be at least at a distance of 30 paces, that is, about 105 feet. Similarly, a corpse has to be kept a distance of 30 paces, according to **Vendidad** 7.8.

Here, many readers may question if there aren't houses today near Fire Temples, whose residents – Parsees or non-Parsees – do not flout the injunctions of the **Vendidad**. Yes, there are! **But what we want to emphasise is that, if a wily *Vakeel* can adduce evidence of some Agiaries lying cheek by jowl with residential/commercial buildings, because of exigencies that may have arisen in the past, it does not give a licence to any new builder of residential premises bang next to a Fire Temple! Here, the trustees of the Fire Temple, whose bounden duty is to maintain and preserve the sanctity of the consecrated Holy Fire, would be culpable of committing a breach of trust by joining hands with the builder!! We repeat that trustees of Agiaries and Atash Behrams have nothing at all to do with any construction business. If they cannot fulfill the objects of the trust deed, they should quit forthwith!**

### **The "Inside Story" of the demolition of Dadyseth House**

"The Parsee Voice" has learnt that both the Mistry father-and-son duo, Pallonji and Shapoor, had expressed a very altruistic desire of constructing flats for Parsees. When a trustee of the Dadyseth Charity Trust heard this, he persuaded them to

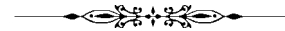
consider demolition of "Dadyseth House", across the Dadyseth **Atash Behram**, and build a big structure for Parsees. Why did he do that? Because of the tremendous FSI potential!!

When, as mentioned in our last issue, Mr. Viraf Chiniwala and your Editor met Pallonji and Shapoor in July 2002, to dissuade them from this venture, Pallonji told us: "*Arre bawa, amonay Parsee-o-mātey gher bāndhwa deoni!*". Mr. Chiniwala requested them to build as many houses for the Parsees, as they wished, on other plots of land owned by the Parsees, but not to vitiate the sanctity of the Dadyseth **Atash Behram**.

Strangely, a "Times of India" report (1st May, 2004), now quotes a trustee, Mr. Ratan Lalkaka, as saying, "The Shapoorji Pallonji family wants to construct the new building free of cost for poor Parsi families. All the money accruing from the sale of some of the flats as well as the transfer of development rights

(TDR) will be put back into the temple's fund". Haven't we heard this before? This is another gimmick employed by the trustees of fire temples, to win over the sympathies of those Parsees, who want a roof over their heads, or to impress some judicial authority that, after all, funds are being generated for the fire temple itself! Let such trustees not delude themselves into believing that the majority in the community are taken in by such ploys!

**We once again appeal both to the trustees of the Dadyseth Charity Trust and to Seth Pallonji and Shapoor not to undertake this sacrilegious venture. Instead, they can build as many buildings as they want elsewhere for the benefit of the community.**



## Stop This Vandalism!

Sir,

This refers to your article "Serious Crisis brewing at Dadyseth Atash Behram." You state therein that along with several small and some quite substantial structures in the Atash Behram premises – the 2 storeyed Dadyseth House is also slated to be demolished to make way for a 7-8 storey residential building accommodating 70 flats. Doubtless, the sanctity of the Atash Behram will be vitiated, not only after the monstrous structure nearly abutting it, will come up, but even in the process of constructing the same!

Most people including Zoroastrians themselves are unaware of the fact that the holy fire that burns in our Atash Behrams is not just a consecrated fire that sparkles in the censer *but a living, throbbing entity* – the *Sarposh* of the censer represents the head the pedestal, the feet, with the **chhatra** as the **crown** of the **Padshah**. The external wall beyond the structure is also very much an integral part of the Holy Atash Behram.

**While you rightly stress the sacred character of the Atash Behram, it may interest you to know that even architecturally, the Dadyseth Atash Behram is interesting. Not only is it the**

**first Atash Behram to be built in Mumbai way back in 1783, but is perhaps one the first if not the first structure (secular or otherwise) which has moulded cast-iron columns on its three-sided verandah, structurally supporting part of its hipped roof.** Incidentally, the date and place of manufacture of these cast-iron columns is inscribed thereon.

On the whole, this **Atash Behram** structure can be pronounced to be simple – almost severe, were we to compare it with those built prior to it in Navsari and Surat, which are imposing and striking. But, what it lacks aesthetically is made good partly by the pattern of its pitched roof and of course by the charming portico through which we enter the **Atash Behram** proper.

The front facade of the portico has three arches and the long passage behind it leading to the **Atash Behram** has a timber pitched roof. The portico and the passage are an eyeful and both are to be axed to make way for the Goliath that will overshadow the holy **Atash Behram**, which to this day is visited by Parsee Zoroastrians who seek restoration of their health.

Finally, as we say, in our Zoroastrian Deen, we pray

not only for ourselves but for the good of all around. Prophet Zarathushtra – the eco-friendly prophet – wanted Zoroastrians to work for and maintain a clean and wholesome environment. Chirabazar, in the midst of which the Dadyseth Atash Behram is located, is already crowded and congested. The

**Atash Behram area with its low-rise structures acts as a lung for this entire area – a soothing, healing balm. Let us not vandalise and destroy it.**

**Aban Sethna**

**A Public Meeting of the Parsee Community has been called on Friday, 4th June, 2004, to protest against the demolition of Dadyseth House and to preserve the sanctity of the Atash Behram. Await further details in our forthcoming issues.**

## આજનાં પારસીઓ તખ્તનશીન થયેલા આતશ પાદશાહોને સામાન્ય અગ્નીજ સમજે છે!

### હાલની પાદશાહોનાં પવિત્ર મકાનોની સમસ્યા આજ કારાગૃહી ઊભી થાય છે!

આતશ બહેરામો અને આદરાનોનાં મકાનોમાં બળતા આતશો, જેઓને પાદશાહોની ઉપમા યોગ્ય રીતેજ આપેલી છે, તેને આજના કેટલાક પારસીઓ, જેમાં આ મકાનોનાં મુતવહીઓ/ટ્રસ્ટીઓ આવી જાય, તેઓ ફક્ત દેખીતા, લાકડાં બળતો અગ્નીજ સમજે છે.

પરંતુ, આ દેખીતા અગ્નીની અંદર તો આતશનું ચૈતન્ય પડેલું છે, કે જે ચૈતન્યની અંદર, જ્યારે દુનિયાનાં આતશોને પાવ (ચોખ્ખા) કરી, તેની ઉપર યજ્ઞને-વંદીદાદ જેવી અમુક સંખ્યામાં, પાવમહેલની ક્રિયાઓ કરી, ઈજવામાં આવે છે, ત્યારે તે આતશનો કુદરતની મહાન આતશની ગતિઓ સાથે સંબંધ ઊભો થાય છે, અને આવી રીતે આ દેખીતા દુનિયવી આતશનું ગોચા કીમિયું થાય છે!

માટેજ આતશ નિયાએશમાં, આપણે પઢ્યે છીએ કે આ નૂરી કેબલો એક “મઝિશ્ત યજ્ઞત” (સર્વેથી મોટા યજ્ઞ) છે. તેઓ એક રૂહાની લડવૈયા (રથેશતાર) છે. એઓ નિરંતર આ દુનિયાની બદી અને બૂરાઈ સામે લડી રહે છે, કે જે માટે એઓ પોતાની કેટલીક રૂહાની શક્તિનો ભોગ આપે છે. માટે દરેક સાચા ભક્તની ફરજ છે કે આતશ પાદશાહોની હિફાજત કરવી, તેઓને યોગ્ય રીતે જાળવવા અને સાચવવા!

તેને બદલે આજે તો આ પાદશાહોનાં મુતવહીઓ પોતેજ પાદશાહો ઉપર મજબૂત પ્રહારો કરી તેઓને પાંગળા બનાવી દે છે!!

દાદીશેઠ આતશબહેરામનાં ટ્રસ્ટીઓ શું કરવા બેઠા છે?

હાલમાં શરૂ થયેલી દાદીશેઠમાં પાક આતશબહેરામનીજ ચર્ચા લો!

તેમની સામેનું “દાદીશેઠ હાઉસ” તોડી પાડી, આ ટ્રસ્ટીઓ, શાપુરજી પાલનજીની જાણીતી પેઢી પાસે ૭ માળની મોટી ઈમારત બાંધવા પ્રેરાયા છે! કાંય? એ કહે કે પારસીઓ, અને ટ્રસ્ટી રતન લાલકાકા પ્રમાણે તો “ગરીબ પારસીઓ” ને માટે ફ્લેટો ઊભા કરવાના છે!!

સૌ પ્રથમ સવાલ તો એજ ઉઠે છે, કે શ્રી લાલકાકા જેવા દાદીશેઠ આતશબહેરામ/અગિઆરીનાં ટ્રસ્ટી, મકાન બાંધવામાં કંઈ રીતે ઉત્સાહ લેવા લાગ્યા? શું “દાદીશેઠ હાઉસ” પડુપડુ, જર્જરીત હાલતમાં છે? જરાએ નહિં! તો કહે કે, આ નવાં મકાનનાં થોડાક ફ્લેટો જે વેચાશે, તેમાંથી દાદીશેઠ આતશબહેરામજ નહિં, પાણ બીજાં આતશબહેરામોનાં પાણ નીભાવ ફંડ માટે ભંડોળ એકથું થશે! કહેતાબી... પાણ જવા દો!!

શ્રીમાન લાલકાકા! મોઘ ભાંજીને ગિલ્દી શા માટે ઊભી કરો છો? પારસીઓ એટલા બેવકુફ છે કે આવી વાહિયાત વાતોથી પ્રેરાઈ જશે? તમો અને તમારા ગોઠ્યા ટ્રસ્ટીઓએ કોઈ પાણ દિવસ પારસી કોમને જાગાવવાની તકલીફ લીધી છે કે પાદશાહને માટે ભંડોળ ઊભું કરવું છે? તો આ પરોપકારીક કોમ આજેબી ઉપરવાળાની જેમ છપ્પર ફાડીને, થોડાક વખતમાંજ મોટું ફંડ ઊભું કરી આપતે! અરે, શેઠો પાલનજી અને શાપુર પાણ એકજ ઈશારાથી લાખો રૂપિયા કાઢી આપતે! પરંતુ, અમુક વ્યક્તિઓની દયાનતજ બૂરી, હોય તો?