

## A Parsi Navjote - From The Eyes Of An "Old" Parsi



### Background

I was only 8 or 9 year old - the last of 11 children in a Dastur family, in a small village of Tarapur in the then Bombay State. I remember that day of reckoning for my Navjote. In those days, the girl/boy had months of tutoring under the strict eye of my father who was the Village Mobed for about 120 Parsi families. We had to learn ALL prayers of the Navjote and had to recite them with Mobeds during the ceremony. However, all these strict tutoring seemed worthwhile because for my Navjote, being the last of eleven children, I finally was privileged to wear my own brand new hand-sewn Lengo (pants), Khamis (shirt), Topi (Parsi cap), and of course Sudra (holy undergarment) and Kasti (sacred thread). And how could you forget the milk and Rose petals you got to shower over your head as a good omen during your bath? And Sev (Parsi vermicelli) and Jhura Rotli (thick Parsi wheat tortilla) for breakfast and the whole village invited for the ceremony including a number of relatives from Udwarda, Bombay, etc. A big outdoor tent was erected for the ceremony and some 100 plus people were fed 3 meals, cooked outside on open fire. A day to remember!

Yes, Navjote is the first major ceremony of our Zoroastrian Religion for a child. It means "Nav" means New and "Jote" means "Flame". The child is deemed prepared for being a member of the community after she/he has understood the prayers, studied our Religion, and learnt to recite the prayers for "tying the Kasti".

Today, we are all gathered here to honor Nicholai, Kyle and Brennan for their Navjotes and help them and their parents and friends and family to celebrate this auspicious occasion which they will remember throughout their life!

### The Nahan (sacred ablution) Ceremony

The Navjote ceremony starts with "Nahan" (sacred ablution). The officiating Mobed and the child first recite the complete Kasti Prayers. The Mobed then recites prayer (Jamwaani Baaj) thanking "Ahura Mazda" for his many bounties. One or two leaves of the pomegranate are then given to the child to chew on. The pomegranate symbolizes eternal life. He and the child then recite a prayer three times and each time the child drinks some juice from a cup. The Mobed then recites prayers to

prepare the child for the bath. After the bath, the Mobed completes the prayers and the child is usually wrapped in a shawl with a "Topi" to cover the head.

### Affirmation Of Faith

After the "Nahan" ceremony, a procession used to take the child around the neighborhood, sometimes accompanied by a local band with a Shehnai and drums. Yes, I was taken from my home to the Agiari (Fire Temple) for the ceremony.

The real ceremony takes place in front of the Majlis (congregation). A stage is usually erected for this, covered with a rug and a white sheet. In the center is placed a small stool (Paatlaa) under the sheet for the child to sit upon. The fire is present on the "Afarganyu" (the fire receptacle) with "Sukhad and Lobaan" (sandalwood and myrrh) placed on it; a "Deevo" (floating candle) is placed next to fire, and a large German-silver "Ses" (round pan) contained all the items for dressing the child after the ceremony. A "Ses" (traditional items in a big or small German-silver tray) is always present for such ceremonies and finally another German-silver tray with a mixture of rice, coconut slivers, resins, almonds, and rose petals to be used by the Mobed for showering blessings. Traditionally, the officiating Mobed will be accompanied by his helper Mobeds; however, depending on availability, he may be alone!

The child sits on the stool and the Mobed starts the first prayers on behalf of the child, "Patet Pashemani" (prayer for repentance). In the old tradition, this prayer was recited by the guilty person in front of a "Dastur" (Head Mobed) declaring his/her intentions to repent for the bad thoughts, words, and deeds and his/her resolve to do the good ones instead. We Parsis are also required to recite this prayer at least on the last day of our calendar (Pateti), the fifth "Vahishtoishta Gatha", on the New Year's eve repenting for all our bad behavior this year and our resolve to do better the next year.

After this prayer, the Mobed and the child stand up facing each other. The Mobed helps the child to get into the two sleeves of the "Sudreh" undergarment (the word means holy path) and holding it in his hands, both of them recite the most important prayer, "Deen-no-Kalmo" (creed for the religion). It proclaims that the religion was entrusted to Zarathushtra by Ahura Mazda to propagate it in this world. This is a very important point for our religion - Zarathushtra is always referred to as "Paygaambar" - a messenger, of Ahura Mazda's "Deen" (religion).

And then, reciting the "Yatha Ahu Vairyo" prayer, the Mobed "garlands" the Sudreh over the head of the child (at the recitation of the word "Shyoththenanaam") so as to wear it completely. In the old days, at that point, rice and rose petals were showered on the child from above and the whole "Majlis" (congregation) gave an ovation for the child.

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The child then faces the “Majlis” and the Mobed, standing behind, unfurls the “Kasti” and holding the child’s thumbs, helps the child to gird the Kasti around the waist the first time, then tying a reef knot in front on the second time, finishing with a reef knot the third time at the end of Kasti. All along, both recite the prayers for “doing the Kasti ritual”.

The final prayer is the Affirmation of Faith - “Mazdayasno Ahmi, Mazdayasno Zarathushtrish” (I am a worshipper of Ahura Mazda, I am a worshipper of the Ahura Mazda’s Religion brought by Zarathushtra).

The child is proclaimed to be a member of the Religion!

### Tandoorasti - Showering Of Blessings

The Mobed and child sit down again, the Mobed gives child flowers, coconut, etc. to hold in hands, as a good omen, stands up and recites “Tandoorasti” (literally means good health) prayer, showering the mixture of rice, coconut, almonds, and rose petals over the child’s head. The child is officially proclaimed by the Mobed as “Osta” if from Mobed family, and “Behdin” if from the “Behdin” (layman) family.

This is the official end of the Navjote ceremony.

### After The Ceremony

The child is dressed completely and in the old days the parents and immediate family and the child went to Agiary (Fire Temple) to pray. Returning, the celebration for the Navjote gets under way with music, dancing, food, and .....

### Sudreh

Sudreh (good road) is the Parsi undergarment to be worn by all Parsis with Kasti (from Pahlavi “Kost” means boundary or limit). Sudreh is viewed as an armor against evil influences. The “V” necked vest has a small pocket in the front (“Gireh-Ban”) as an allegorical purse for storing meritorious deeds for ultimate presentation at the time of Final Judgement. At the back of the “V” neck is a similar pouch (“Girdo”) as an allegorical load of destiny to be borne by the individual.

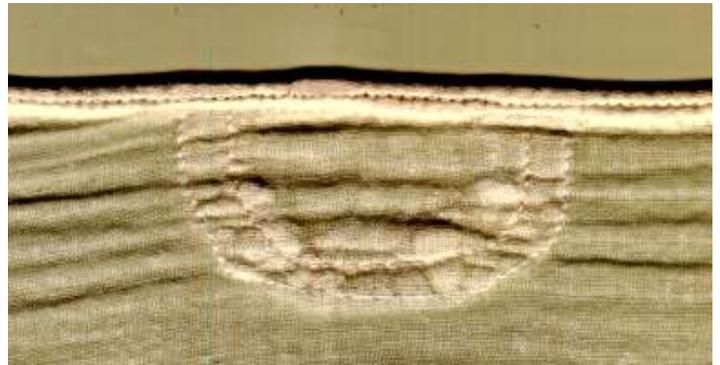
### Kasti

Kasti is the sacred thread woven of seventy two threads of pure lamb’s wool. The lamb’s wool is the emblem of innocence and purity. The seventy two threads symbolize the 72 chapters (“Ha’s”) of the “Yasna”, a compilation of liturgical prayers including the Holy Gathas of Zarathushtra



THE BOTTOM PART OF THE “V” OF SUDREH, “GIREH-BAN”

THE TOP BACK PART OF THE “V” OF SUDREH, “GIRDO”



KASTI - AS GIRDED AROUND WAIST WITH 2 KNOTS FRONT AND BACK.

