

The Sacred Fires

The Pre-Zoroastrian Fire Cult

The Avestan word *ātar* (MP *ādar/ātaksh*, NP *ātaš*) meaning fire is of unknown origin. The reverence for fire can nevertheless be traced back to Indo-European times. Many centuries later the Proto-Indo-Iranians, who were nomadic pastoralists, used fire as a source of comfort as it provided them with warmth and light during their wanderings on the south Russian steppes.

Without fire, it would have been impossible for the Proto-Indo-Iranians to survive in the bitterly cold climes of the south Russian steppes. As a result of this, they realized their dependence upon fire which they venerated as a divinity. Fire was then anthropomorphized as their servant and master.

They worshipped the fire by offering it clean dry wood, incense and fat which was obtained through animal sacrifice. They recognized the special quality of fire, and hence *ātar* was used and propitiated in all their religious ceremonies. Gradually they came to realize that the luminosity and brightness of the sun was symbolized through their own hearth fires which became their object of veneration. The sun it is believed was associated with the order (*Sk. rta*) that regulated the rising and setting of the sun. The regular pattern of this occurrence gave the Indo-Iranians a framework to conceptualize the established truths within the universe. Hence the link between the sun and fire was formed, whereupon fire came to be recognized as the symbol of truth. This in turn led to the use of fire as the tester of truth. A person was put through a fire ordeal in order to establish his innocence or guilt. In one such ordeal, the accused was made to pass through two raging fires set close together; in another ordeal, molten metal was poured onto the person's bare chest. In each case, if the accused survived the test, he was deemed to be innocent and was seen to have the protection of Mitra, the Lord of Contract. Thus, fire from ancient times has been recognized to be the visible embodiment of truth.

Fire: In Zarathushtra's Revelation

Fire, in Zoroastrianism, is the focal point of worship, praise and propitiation. In its simplest form, fire is that which burns and gives out light. The burning may be likened to that which renders something pure, whilst the light may be seen as the life-giving energy that permeates the seven creations.

Zarathushtra was the bearer of an earlier Iranian tradition in which fire was associated with truth and order. The zest for fire in Zoroastrianism became the quest for truth. For, Zarathushtra in his *Gāthās* declared, "....At the gift of veneration to you, fire, I shall think of truth to the utmost of my power...." (Y.43.9). The epithet for fire in the *Gāthās* is *āthrō ashā aojanhō* - "the truth-strong fire". When this truth-strong fire burns, it symbolically reflects the inherent purity that lies within God's creations. Purity is the abstract form of that which is allied to truth, which man as the *ashavan* must strive to possess. The role of fire in Zoroastrian veneration therefore is quite profound. It is through fire that a link is believed to develop between truth and purity which, when realized by the individual, gives him a gnosis of the fire of God.

A Zoroastrian thus, through the veneration of fire, is able to generate an intimate communion with God who is deemed to be the Father of fire - *tava ātarsh puthra, Ahurahē Mazdāō* - "Unto thee, Fire, Son of Ahura Mazdā" (*Āt. Ny.5.4*). For, within that communion, are sown the seeds of power, truth and purity. "...we wish Thy fire, O Lord, which possesses strength through truth and which is the swiftest forceful thing, to be of clear help to Thy supporter, but of visible harm....to Thy enemy, O Wise One." (Y.34.4). In other words, fire enables a Zoroastrian to experience the truth when the holy words, which in themselves contain the truth, are uttered. The power which is generated as a result of this "fusion" is the power that will smite the evil spirit and its

legions. Man must consciously strive to remember and rekindle the fire of God which dwells deep within the heart of man. When that happens, man becomes aware of a consciousness of a high order; the whole of creation then comes to light, reflecting the inherent nature of God mirrored back to Himself through His finest creation, man. Hence when a Zoroastrian prays to the fire, he is praying to the creation that represents life and the inherent nature of God – total goodness.

Fire : The Seventh Creation

According to the Creation story as stated in the *Bundahishn*, the radiance of fire is from Endless Light – the abode of Ahura Mazda. God created forth the fire which is believed to possess the quality of transcendence. A Zoroastrian who responds to this quality, automatically opens the door to the eminence of God which is to be received through the transcendence of the fire. For it is stated that when God fashioned His seventh creation Fire, it permeated into His other six creations which were then made dynamic and brought to life. The permeating quality of fire is symbolic of the consciousness that man possesses, for it is through consciousness that an awareness between man and the other creations develops. The right awareness dispels falsehood, just as the fire radiates luminosity to cast away the darkness. The purity and goodness that radiates from the fire is all-encompassing and of a different nature, for within fire lies not only the brightness and purity which man learns to harmonize with, but also the inherent power of life. For it is said, “....Ohrmazd created forth the astral body of His own creatures in the astral form of luminous, white fire....”¹, and “....the seeds of men and animals were those seeds that were from the essence of fire.”²

Fire is both a master of, and a servant to man who is given warmth and light through its

physical manifestation. In doing so, the fire becomes subservient to man, “....He ordered the fire to perform the service of man, to prepare food and to smite disease, during the antagonism of Ahriman.” (GBd.3.9). When man prays before a sacred fire, the fire assumes the role of a master who is propitiated by man in order to gain a personal experience of truth, purity and righteousness.

When this happens, man becomes supremely strong and is able to repel the forces of evil. Man is God's finest creation, and hence is faced with the responsibility of either kindling or dousing the flame; “....and when they blow it out of anything, it should come out, and when they put fuel over it, it should hold forth.” (GBd.3.9).

The role of man is to re-establish a conscious link with the ray of Endless Light in order that man's essence will be in accord with the Cosmic Fire, God. For, “....He produced the Fire.... He attached to it the ray from Endless Light.” (GBd.1a.4).

The Development of the Fire Temple Cult

In ancient times, Zoroastrians had no fixed places of worship. Within each home the hearth fire was venerated and propitiated, and this practice it seems, continued for over a thousand years after the advent of the prophet. It was in Achaemenian times that permanent altars appear to have been adopted for the veneration of fire. From the reign of King Darius I (522 – 486 B.C.) onwards, there is evidence by way of rock reliefs where the king is “shown revering fire set on a three-stepped pillar altar”.³ These were the king's personal fires of worship, greatly exalted and revered, befitting the monarch. “There is no evidence to suggest that fire was enthroned anywhere as the object of public cult in the time of Darius”.⁴ However, communal worship directed to Ahura Mazda and the *Yazatas* was

1. GBd.1.44
2. GBd.1a.3

3. Mary Boyce in “*Ātash*” Encyclopaedia - Persica.
4. Mary Boyce in “*Ātash*” Encyclopaedia - Persica.

offered in the open as late as the 5th century B.C.

It seems that during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404–359 B.C.), image worship of the goddess Anahita grew. This form of worship was probably adopted by the Achaemenians from their Semitic counterparts who worshipped the mother goddess, 'the heavenly Aphrodite'.⁵ It is at this juncture that the Zoroastrian scholar priests of the day probably introduced the temple worship of fire in opposition to the new image worship of the water divinity, Anahita.

Thereafter, for centuries, the Zoroastrians had two types of temples; one in which was housed a sacred fire, and the other dedicated to a *Yazata*, containing a cult-image. The earliest mention of temple fires occurs in the *Yendīdād*. "...thou Holy One! If a man brings to the *Dāityo-gātu* the fire of his own hearth, what shall be his reward....?" (*Vd*.8.96).

The earliest fire temples were probably sanctuaries where the fires of the kings and nobles must have been founded, and hence these fires were dedicated to *Bahrām*, the *Yazata* for victory. It was through the Lord of Victory that the warriors of the Zoroastrian faith gained their strength and power, and hence burning embers from the *Bahrām* fire used to be carried into battle by the Iranian armies. It is presumably during this period that the Zoroastrian priesthood became more powerful, and hence the priests began to elaborate the rituals of purification which were connected with the king's fires. Allied to the development of this practice, grew the lesser class of fires known as the *Ātash Ādarān*. These fires were formed of embers from the hearth fires of members of the four different classes of Iranian society (priests, warriors, farmers and artisans). Over a period of centuries, the old hearth fires seem to have lost their importance due to the development of the other two categories of fires. Eventually, there came into existence the *Bahrām*, *Ādarān* and *Dādgāh* fires.

5. Herodotus, *History*, Bk.I p 131, Loeb Classical Library.

It was probably during Parthian times (248 B.C.-224 A.C.) that the priests created three great fires which are historically known to have existed.

1. *Ādur Farnbāg* - the "Fire having a share through Fortune", which was kept burning in Fars (*GBd*.18.10).
2. *Ādur Gushnasp* - the "Fire of the Stallion", which was kept burning in Media (*GBd*.18.12).
3. *Ādur Burzēn Mihr* - the "Fire of the Exalted Mihr", which was kept burning in Parthia (*GBd*.9.26).

Ādur Farnbāg, *Ādur Gushnasp* and *Ādur Burzēn Mihr* came to be identified as the fires of the priests, warriors and farmers respectively (*GBd*.18.17).

In the *Greater Bundahishn*, there is a legend in which is outlined the creation of these three fires. It is said that Ohrmazd Himself created these three fires "...like three lights for the watching of the world, they ever glittered..." (*GBd*.18.8).

There is also a legend that in the reign of Takhmūraf⁶, a group of people were travelling along the seashore when they were caught in a storm. Owing to the storm, the brazier on the back of the bull *Srīsōk*⁷ was blown away into the sea. Soon afterwards, three fires like lost glories took the place of the original single fire, thus enabling the travellers to complete their journey (*GBd*.18.9). These three ceremonial fires are also held to have miraculous properties such as those of flying, healing and of spreading the knowledge of the Zoroastrian faith.

6. A culture hero who sought power over demons and men. He is believed to have taught man the art of spinning wool, gathering flocks and taming wild birds and beasts.
7. *Srīsōk* is the mythical bull also known as *Hadhayans* who will be sacrificed at the end of time.

It was probably in Parthian times that Zoroastrian priests evolved another five-fold classification of fires.

"The fire Berezi-savangh is the fire which glitters before Ohrmazd the Lord.

The fire Vohu.fryāna is that which is in the bodies of men and animals.

The fire Urvāzishta is that which is in the plants.

The fire Vāzishta is that which is in the clouds. And the fire Spenishta is that which is kept in use in the material world." (*Gd.* 18.2 – 6).

The fire of Berezi-savangh is the fire of great benefit, and it links man to the fire of God. It symbolically gives energy to all God's creations and when it burns in the heart of man, it gives man peace and tranquility coupled with great benefit.

The next fire is that of Vohu.fryāna, which means "loving the good". Traditionally, this fire is seen as the life force in men and animals. Symbolically this fire represents a greater consciousness within the psyche of man. It is this fire which reflects the emotional light that manifests through love, compassion, righteousness and justice in a person. When man chooses to rekindle this fire, he becomes conscious of his environment through which an awareness and empathy is generated towards the well-being of the world.

The third fire is that of Urvāzishta, which means the "most joyful". This fire is traditionally seen as the life force in plants and it symbolically represents the happiness and joy within this world. Man's task is to kindle this fire in order that the latent happiness and joy within him may come alive.

The fourth fire is that of Vāzishta, which means the "swiftest/best". Traditionally, this fire is associated with lightning. It is man's task to be consciously aware of the link that exists between God and His creations. When lightning strikes, it is to remind man of the vast

power and swiftness that lies within the Creator. The fire of lightning in man comes alive when man continuously chooses to maintain contact with his primordial source, God.

The fifth fire is that of Spenishta; which means the "most beneficent". This fire comes from Endless Light and it reflects the inherent nature of God who is totally good. When man recognizes and experiences the fire of Spenishta, it is an all-encompassing communion during which man realizes the inherent nature of goodness. The gnosis of this goodness then makes Spenishta man's inseparable companion in the quest for truth.

All these five fires reflect a quality, giving each fire a character and an identity of its own. Man has a two-fold relationship with these fires; he has to kindle these fires of God emotionally in order that the act of reverence, praise and propitiation may be fulfilled.

The essence of fire symbolically reflects and represents the immutable law of order and truth. When the fire in man is extinguished, the purpose of life is lost and man gradually drifts into the world of darkness and untruth. The "nouveau" Zoroastrians will be those who will realize the need of kindling and replenishing the fires within and without in order that they, as the torch-bearers of the "good religion", will be able to carry the spirit of Zoroastrianism embodied within the sacred fires into the twenty-first century!

Ātash Bahrām Consecration: A Zoroastrian Miracle

An Ātash Bahrām fire is consecrated through an elaborate series of rituals during which the highest laws of purity are maintained by the team of priests involved in the process of making this fire. The bringing together of sixteen fires representing the natural order as well as the different trades and classes of ancient Iranian society, reflects the universality

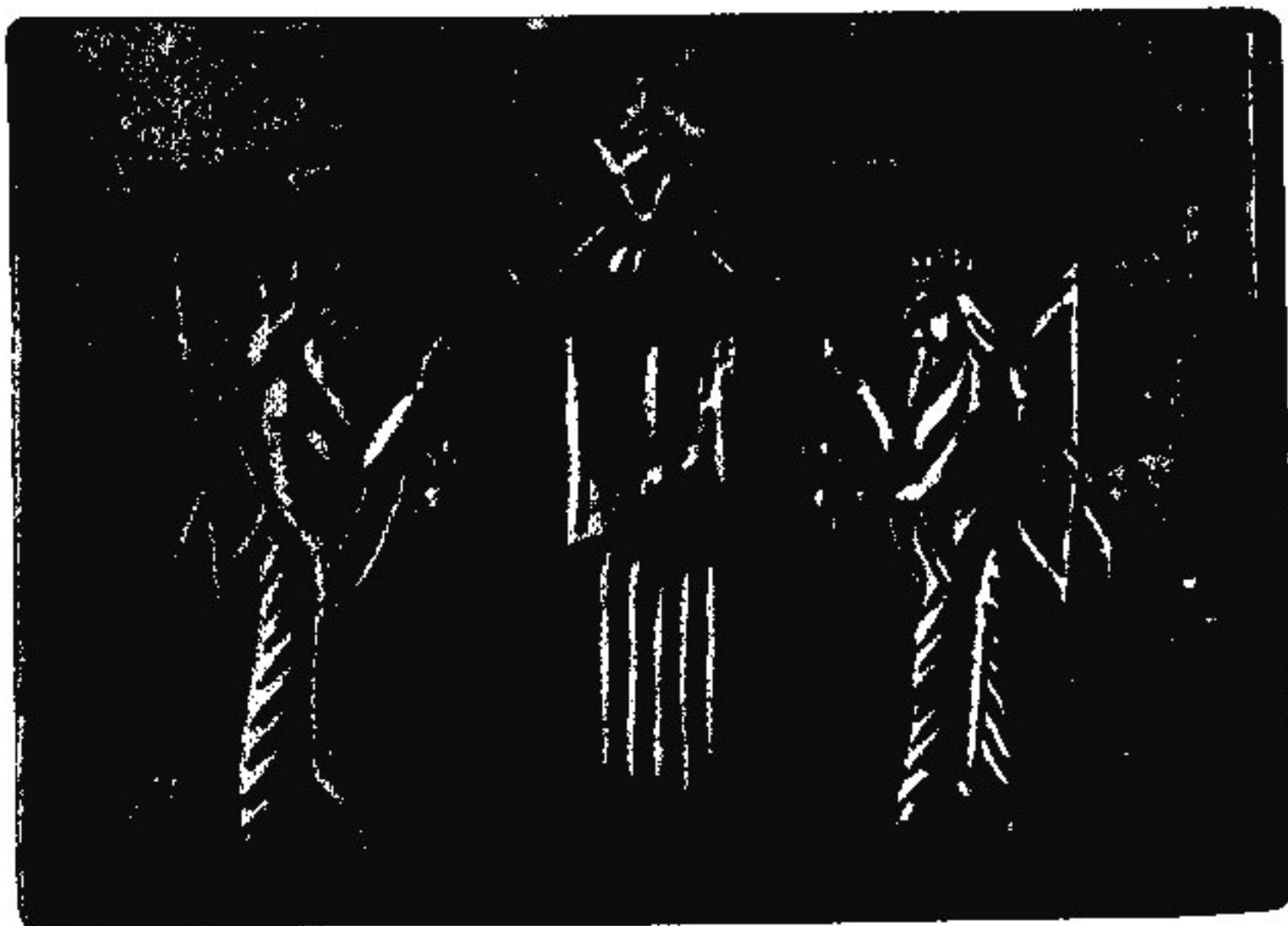
of the *Ātash Bahrām* fire. The fire of lightning, for example, is collected when lightning strikes the earth and is witnessed by two Zoroastrians, whilst the sixteenth fire, the household fire of a Zoroastrian, is made by the priest first creating a fire through friction using flint stones or twigs, and then mixing it with the hearth-fire of a *behdīn*.

Each of the sixteen fires is initially made to burn in the open with dry sandalwood placed a foot away from it, in order that the wind may ignite the adjacent pile of dry wood. This process is repeated as many times as indicated in the tabular diagram. Upon the completion of this procedure, the fires are made ready for the actual purification and consecration rituals to begin.

Two priests who are in a state of high ritual purity, take a perforated ladle upon which is placed dry sandalwood, and hold it above the fire which has already passed through the required number of collection processes necessary for the purification to take place. The sandalwood on the ladle is ignited through the heat of the fire burning below it. The newly ignited second fire is then made to kindle the wood placed on the third ladle, which in turn is also held above the previous fire. This process is repeated as many times for each fire as was done during the collection procedure. The final ladle containing the refined fire is then kept aside and preserved for the next stage of consecration. The entire purification ritual is repeated for each of the sixteen different fires.

Then begins the elaborate process of consecration. On the first day, a portion of the preserved fire is consecrated by the performance of the *Yasna* (*Guj. Ijashne*) and *Vendidād* ceremonies alongwith the *Khshnūman* dedicated to Ohrmazd.⁸ This consecrated fire is then kept burning in a separate container. On the second day, another portion of the purified though unconsecrated fire from the ladle is taken and is likewise consecrated as the first portion. This second fire is then mixed with the consecrated fire of the first day. On the third day, another portion from the ladle fire is consecrated with the performance of the *Yasna* and *Vendidād* ceremonies alongwith the *Khshnūman* in honour of Ohrmazd. This consecrated fire is then mixed with the combined consecrated fires of the first and second days. This process is then repeated by the priests as many times as indicated in the tabular diagram, for each specific fire. For example, the consecration process for the fire

8. For the first 3 days in the consecration of the fire of a burning corpse, the *Khshnūman* is recited in honour of Ohrmazd, whilst for the remaining days the *Khshnūman* is dedicated to the specific *Yazata* of the day. Likewise, for the first 3 days in the consecration of the fire of a dyer, the *Khshnūman* is dedicated to Vahman, and so forth as indicated in the table.



Noblemen worshipping before a fire altar

of a burning corpse is repeated 91 times; in other words, 91 *Yasnas* and *Vendidāds* are performed in order to refine and consecrate this highly impure fire.⁹ These exacting rituals are performed by the priests who it is said, on an average pray for at least eleven hours every day. The same process is repeated concurrently by additional pairs of priests whose task it is to purify the other fifteen fires ritually. Eventually, after nearly 12,400 hours of praying, sixteen purified fires are kept burning in sixteen separate fire vases (*afarganya*).

The final process of uniting these sixteen different fires generally begins on the day of the first *Gāthā*. Two priests in *paiwand* and in a high state of ritual purity take the first purified fire in a ladle and place it on the large fire vase upon which the final consecrated fire is to be enthroned. The same process is repeated with the other fifteen fires with the recitation of an appropriate formulae of prayers. Upon the mixing of the sixteen fires, a further series of rituals are performed. For the

next thirty-four days, the *Yasna* and *Vendidād* ceremonies are performed daily by the priests. The chamber in which the final consecrated fire is to be installed, is also purified and consecrated through a set of elaborate rituals.

On the day of the enthronement, a final *Yasna* is performed and the fire is taken in a procession led by the *dasturs*, from the *Ijashne gāh*¹⁰ to the chamber (sanctum sanctorium). A consecrated path (*pavi*) is made between the *Ijashne gāh* and the sanctum sanctorium, in order to maintain the fire in the highest state of ritual purity and perfection. Upon the fire being installed in the chamber, a final thanksgiving ceremony (*jashan*) is performed, bringing to fruition many months of hard work.

The *Ātash Bahrām* fire therefore is no ordinary fire, but one that has been kindled into existence through the performance of an extraordinary series of complex rituals complemented with over 14,000 hours of the recitation of Zoroastrian prayers.

9. The process of changing an impure state into a pure one may be likened to the nature of man which also requires to undergo a process of purification and cleansing, in order that man may be able to bring about the perfection and final renovation of this world.

10. The demarcated area in the fire temple, where the inner rituals are performed.

The Consecration of the "Fire of Victory"¹¹

The kinds of fires	No. of times for the basic collection, purification and consecration processes	Names of the <i>Yazatas</i> in whose honour the <i>Yasnas</i> and <i>Vendidād</i> are performed for the first 3 days during the consecration period
1. Fire of a burning corpse	91	Ohrmazd
2. Fire of a dyer	80	Vahman
3. Fire of a king or ruling authority	70	Ardvahišt
4. Fire of a potter	61	Shahrewar
5. Fire of a brickmaker	75	Spendārmad
6. Fire of an ascetic	50	Hordād
7. Fire of a goldsmith or an alchemist	60	Amurdād
8. Fire of a mint	55	Daē pa Ādur
9. Fire of an ironsmith	61	Ādur
10. Fire of an armourer	61	Ardvīsūr
11. Fire of a baker	61	Khorshēd
12. Fire of a brewer or an idol worshipper	61	Māh
13. Fire of a soldier or traveller	35	Teshtar
14. Fire of a shepherd	33	Gōsh
15. Fire of atmospheric electricity (lightning)	90	Daē pa Mihr
16. Fire of a Zoroastrian (a fire is kindled through friction by a <i>dastur</i> and <i>mobed</i> and it is then mixed with the fire of a <i>behdīn</i>) (40 + 144)	184	Mihr
	1,128 times	

11. Dr. Sir J.J. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, p 210.

A Brief Summary of the Development of Fire Temples in India

Within a hundred years of the first pilgrim fathers arriving in India, a fire in honour of Bahrām was consecrated. An important point to bear in mind is that only the ash, *ālāt*, and *nīrang*, it is believed, were brought from Iran to maintain the ritual continuity (*silsilā*). For over seven hundred years, this was the only communal fire that was established by the Zoroastrians for purposes of worship and pilgrimage. With new settlements, the prosperity and well-being of the community grew and as a result, groups of Zoroastrians founded new colonies to which the priests were also invited.

During the early centuries, houses of worship (*Agiaries/Dar-i-mihrs*) were built, but without permanently installed fires. In these houses of worship, however, the laws of ritual purity were maintained in order that the high rituals of the religion could be performed. In spite of these *Agiaries* not having permanently burning fires, they were nevertheless built with adequate provisions being taken for the necessary ritual requirements such as the regular supply of fresh well-water, and easy access to a date palm and pomegranate tree inside the fire temple courtyard. The fire required for the performance of rituals was brought by the priests, who themselves lived with their families in a state of high ritual purity. Upon the completion of the ritual, the priests would carry their hearth-fire back to their homes.

The oldest Parsi *Dar-i-mihr* was founded in Navsari in the 12th century A.C. It is believed that it was established by Kamdīn Zarthost, who came to Navsari with his two sons from Sanjan circa 1142 A.C. Another *Dar-i-mihr* was founded in Broach at about the same time. From the 15th century onwards many more *Dar-i-mihrs* were built, but without a continuously burning consecrated fire housed in them.

The next *Ātash Bahrām* was established in Navsari in 1765 A.C. Soon afterwards, an endowed *Dādghāh* fire was enthroned at the *Vadi Dar-i-mihr* in Navsari in 1796 A.C.

Ādarāns

The earliest consecrated *Ādarān* fire was founded in Surat in 1771 A.C.¹²

In Bombay:

The first *Dar-i-mihr*¹³ without a sacred fire was established by Mody Hirji Waccha in circa 1672 A.C.

A generation later a well-to-do citizen Banaji Limji by name, established a consecrated fire in 1709 A.C.

The second *Ādarān* was founded by Maneckji Seth in 1735 A.C.

The third *Ādarān* was established by Dady Seth in 1783 A.C.

In Calcutta:

An *Ādarān* was installed in 1839 A.C.

In Karachi:

An *Ādarān* was installed in 1848 A.C.

Ātash Bahrāms

Udvada : (*Shenshai* – Anjuman); the only *Ātash Bahrām* in India for over seven hundred years.

Navsari : (*Shenshai* – Anjuman) 1765 A.C.

Bombay : (*Kadmi* – Dady Seth) 1783 A.C.

Surat : (*Kadmi* – Vakil) 1823 A.C.

Surat : (*Shenshai* – Mody) 1823 A.C.

Bombay : (*Shenshai* – Wadia) 1830 A.C.

Bombay : (*Kadmi* – Banaji) 1844 A.C.

Bombay : (*Shenshai* – Anjuman) 1898 A.C.

12. The famous ship-builder of Bombay, Lowji Wadia, founded an *Ādarān* in the village of Siganpur, in the latter half of the 18th century.

13. This place burned down in 1803 A.C.

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, seven *Ātash Bahrāms* and more than one hundred and fifty *Ādarāns* and *Dadgāhs* were established, clearly reflecting the prosperity of individual Zoroastrians who, as a mark of respect and gratitude towards their religion, built many houses of worship.

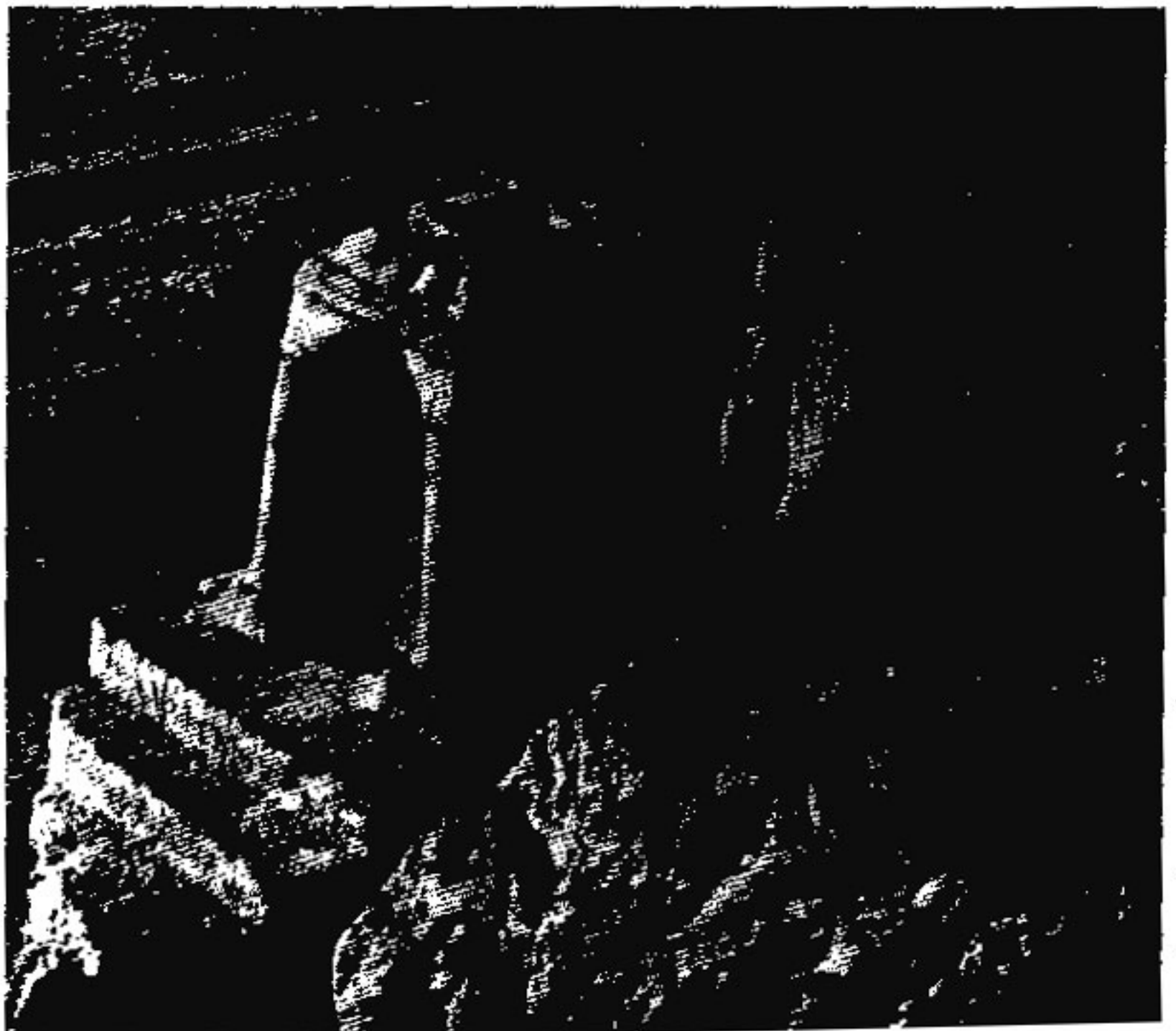
A miniscule community, endowed with many fire temples which were built by the committed faithful in the past, has failed today in its duty towards maintaining these houses of worship which in many cases have fallen into a state of utter neglect and disrepair; a sad indictment indeed to the philanthropic endowment of the illustrious Zoroastrians of yesteryear.

It is believed that the main cause for this state of neglect is directly related to a shortage of

funds. However, the crisis today is not merely due to a dearth of material resources, but is one that reflects the diminishing commitment coupled with a lack of responsibility and leadership within the community. As a result, the sacred fires which for generations have bonded a small community together, are today flickering and indeed in a few instances have been allowed to "die"!

The answer therefore lies in Zoroastrians, both young and old, re-dedicating themselves to the sacred fires in order that a link may once again be established between the fires that dwell in the hearts of Zarathushtra's followers and those that are enthroned in the fire temples.

Fire altar — Naqsh-e-Rustam (c 6th century B.C.)



Appendix 1

Are Zoroastrians fire worshippers?

Non-Zoroastrians are often intrigued and puzzled by the veneration of fire in Zoroastrianism. This has resulted in the belief that Zoroastrians are fire worshippers. If by worship is meant an attitude of reverence, worthiness and respect, then indeed Zoroastrians are fire worshippers just as they are the worshippers of the other six creations as well. However, Zoroastrians are not fire worshippers in a pejorative sense, no more than Christians being referred to as cross worshippers or the Jews being regarded as *menorah* worshippers.

Fire, the seventh creation, is a potent symbol in Zarathushtra's revelation. It is seen by Zoroastrians as the physical representation of light and truth as symbolized through the brightness and purity of the sacred fire. All the religious rituals, the performance of which is an important Zoroastrian duty, are solemnized in the presence of fire.

Why are non-Zoroastrians not allowed to enter a consecrated fire temple?

In order to worship and pray before the living symbol of truth, every responsible Zoroastrian is religiously duty-bound to wear the sacred undershirt (*sudreh*) over which is tied a specially woven girdle (*kūsti*). It is for this reason that non-Zoroastrians are not allowed to present themselves before the fire, as they are doctrinally not permitted to wear the *sudreh* and *kūsti*. It is only upon the performance of the *navjote* ceremony that a person is deemed to become a Zoroastrian, after which the wearing of the *sudreh* and *kūsti* becomes obligatory. Nevertheless, a young Parsi or Irani child whose *navjote* has not been performed is allowed into a fire temple on the grounds that the child is a potential Zoroastrian and that the parents are spiritually responsible for the child until the *navjote* ceremony is performed.

Furthermore, certain stringent ritual laws of purity have to be maintained in the temples where the Bahrām and Ādarān fires burn. It is believed that the transgression of these laws results in the lessening of the purity of the sacred fire. It is therefore unreasonable to expect non-Zoroastrians to conform to the specific ritual requirements of the tradition, and hence their entry into the consecrated Zoroastrian houses of worship is restricted.

By way of analogy, a non-Muslim is not permitted to enter the holy city of Mecca in order to see the Ka'aba, nor is a non-Hindu allowed into the inner precincts of the Jagannathan temples in Orissa. With the same token, non-Christians are not allowed to enter the Coptic orthodox churches in Ethiopia, just as a non-Jew is forbidden to enter an orthodox Hessian synagogue in New York. In short, upon closer examination it is clear that the religious traditions in which rituals and the laws of purity have been retained, generally proscribe the entry of non-faith members into their respective houses of worship.

In India, entry into a fire temple requires two conditions to be fulfilled:

- i. The person must be a Parsi or Irani by race.
- ii. The person must be a Zoroastrian by religion.

Appendix 2

Menstruation: "A Temporary Ban"

In Zoroastrian theology, there is great emphasis upon the maintenance of the laws of purity which are seen to be at the heart of a Zoroastrian's devotional life. Thus in Zoroastrianism, a menstruating woman is held to be in a doctrinally "impure state". This is not to be seen as an indictment against women alone, for in the tradition, painful continuous discharge of any kind including the emission of blood is deemed to render the body ritually impure. Hence, even a priest who may have a

bleeding sore or an unhealed wound is not permitted to enter the precincts of a fire temple until he undergoes ritual purification.

However, confusion often arises when one fails to distinguish between regular biological occurrences and theological injunctions.¹⁴ Although menstruation is physiologically necessary, theologically it is seen as an afflic-

tion, as anything that brings about discomfort and pain is doctrinally deemed to be the work of evil. The fact that a woman menstruates regularly does not in any way mitigate her from being considered to be in a temporary state of impurity. During this state, a woman is enjoined not to perform the *kūstī* more than seven times a day¹⁵ and is also advised not to recite any of the other longer prayers.

14. A menstruating woman in the Islamic tradition is not allowed to touch the Holy Book nor can she attend religious functions (*milad*). Likewise, an orthodox Jewish lady is made to take a ritual bath after her menstruation. Similar practices also exist in the other orthodox traditions of the world in which rituals and the laws of purity are maintained.

A menstruating woman therefore is not permitted to enter a fire temple, as her presence before the sacred fire is deemed to lower the ritual purity and perfection of the consecrated fire, the "Son of Ahura Mazdā".

15. *Per.Riv.* p 221.



Head of a Parthian Princess — Susa (1st century B.C.)