

DADGAH, AGIARY & DAR-E-MEHR

TERMS EXPLAINED

There is seldom any confusion regarding the terms *Atash Bahram* and *Atash Adaran* because the distinction between the two grades of fire are self-evident in the nomenclature itself. However the terms *dadgah*, *agiary* and *dar-e-meher* can be very confusing to the average person because of a variety of ways in which the term is interchangeably applied. What follows is an attempt to help clarify the confusing terminology.

DADGAH

The word *dadgah* simply means a lawful place. It comes from the Avesta term *Dâityô gatu--* meaning lawful place. *Dâitya* is similar to *dad* meaning "law", such as *Vendidad--Vi-daeva-dad (t)* -- the law against demons.

The house hold fire or the hearth fire does not require any special ceremony and is either perpetually burning or allowed to be extinguished and relit again when necessary. This is what we do at our *Darbe-Mehr* in Toronto. However, even this lowest grade fire when housed in a public place such as a *Darbe-Mehr* or an *agiary* in India etc. requires a minimum amount of consecration rituals especially of the building or structure where it is to be housed.

The word *gah* also has many different meanings. It can mean a place as above, as in *aramgah* for a burial ground, or it can mean a period of time as in *Haavan gah*, time of the day or as in *gah-i-gathabyo*, the period of five *gatha* days during *Fraverdegan*. Please note that there is no such word as the frequently mispronounced word *geh*. *Gah-i-Haavan* meaning the time period of *Haavan*, has been mispronounced by Parsis in India and corrupted into the word *Haavan geh*. You will never hear a Zoroastrian from Iran pronounce it as *geh* --they will always pronounce it correctly as *gah*.

In the month of May 2007, we discussed this topic in our Adult Class, based on excerpts taken from a lecture given by Dasturji Kotwal on the same subject. The text of the same is reproduced below for further information and elaboration.

Excerpts from Dasturji Dr. Firoze Kotwal's lecture on "Daadgaah and Adaraan"

According to religious law a place that has been ritually prepared is known as Daadgaah. In Zoroastrianism the term "Daadgaah" which is derived from the Avestan word, "Daaityogaatu" meaning, a "lawful place" is used in many different ways. In the *Atash Niyaayesh*, the word "Daadgaah" is used as a **common noun**. The devotee praises the miraculous power and glory of *Atash Behram Saheb*, considering him as the victorious king of holy fires and remembers with devotion the three ancient spiritual fires, namely *Adar Frobaay*, *Adar Gushnasp* and *Adar Burzin Meher* which according to religious law have been enthroned on their proper places ("Ke pa Daadgaah Neshast Ested").

The term Daadgaah as a **proper noun** is attributed to the third grade of the holy fire. However, in ancient times the term Daadgaah was used as a common term for the "seat or place" **of all the three grades of fire.**

With the passage of time, the term "Daadgaah" began to be used also for the Dakhma which was seen as the "lawful place" for consigning dead bodies (Nasa), and began to be used as such in old documents and inscriptions. Zoroastrians of Iran and India used the term Daadgaah in both senses. In the Persian inscription of the Dakhma erected by the Anjuman of Mumbai in 1779 C.E., it is written, "Daadgaah i.e., Dakhmu". The Anjuman of Bharuch has also used the term "Daadgaah" for Dakhma. In 1878, the Dakhma built by Seth Nussarwanji Ratanji Tata was opened in Navsari. The entire history of that Dakhma was published by Ervad Dadabhai Khurshetjee Dordi with the title, "Daadgaah-e-Noshirwan", meaning, the Dakhma built by Noshirwanji R. Tata (the father of steel magnate, Jamshedji N. Tata).

There is reason to believe that when the term Daadgaah began to be used as a **proper noun**, for the third grade of the holy fire, the same term gradually ceased to be used in connection with the impure corpses or Nasa. Instead the term Dakhma came to be used as a technical term among the Parsis of Iran and India in connection with their system of disposal of dead bodies. **(In Avestan the term Dakhma literally means, "grave, tomb". One word can, and is often used with different meanings at different times,** and so a technical term like Dakhma, which has a general usage by the community, need not be construed in a literal sense). For the first time the term, "Towers of Silence" was coined for Dakhma by Mr. Robert Xavier Murphy, who was employed as Oriental Translator to the Mumbai Government during the time of the British.

In the 10th Century C.E., the ancestors of the Parsis left their motherland Iran and landed in Sanjan, in Gujarat in order to preserve the ancient Parsi race and religion. After coming to Sanjan they sent full-fledged Priests (Mobeds) to Khorasan in Iran and brought from there on foot the ritual apparatus (Aalaat) and established with it, our first Atash Behram of India which is fondly called Iranshah by the Parsis. At that time, the hearth fire of every Zoroastrian house was maintained continuously and served as the Daadgaah of that family. The Mobeds served the Atash Behram with devotion maintaining all religious rules and principles. When Zoroastrians moved to other places in Gujarat like Navsari, Bharuch, Ankleshwar, etc. with their family, **the fire for rituals performed by the Mobeds in these modest places of worship, was brought from the nearby houses of Zoroastrians. After the ceremonies were completed the fire was returned to the household Daadgaah.** In those times the house of every Zoroastrian was like a fortress of righteousness and despite adverse conditions they used to maintain all religious principles strongly.

The second grade of fire that Parsi Zoroastrians in India call **Adaraan** is a concept imported from Iran after centuries in India. The Zoroastrians of India had begun to correspond with those in Iran and the Irani Zoroastrians exhorted their Indian counterparts to establish Adaraans in Zoroastrian localities.

It should be remembered that the ritual prescribed for establishing the second grade of fire **is even simpler and easier** than the ceremonies for establishing a Daadgaah fire in India. **According to the Irani practice, no high liturgical ceremonies like the Yasna, Vendidad or Baj ceremonies are performed.** The Irani Zoroastrians

take the flame to its proper place and recite the Atash Niyaesh. This is the ritual direction given by the Irani Priests in Persian Rivayats for establishing an Adaraan fire.

Since the concept of enthroning the Adaraan fire in India came late, there was no fixed standard for establishing it in the beginning years. For example, the Adaraan of Maneckjee Sett in Mumbai was established in accordance with the prescriptions given by a learned priest of Navsari. An old note states that it was established with the performance of three Yasna and three Vendidad ceremonies in honour of Sarosh Yazad, and an injunction is also given to perform 19 additional Vendidad ceremonies in honour of other 19 divinities. This old writing suggests that prior to the scheme established for setting up the second grade of Adaraan fire, it was done in accordance with the guidance given by the learned Dasturs. **Contrary to popular belief, the learned Dasturs of India have never decreed that there should be an Adaraan fire where there is the first grade of fire viz. the Atash Behram Saheb.** There is not a single evidence in Parsi history that the most ancient Atash Behram of Sanjan had an Adaraan fire attached to it. **In 1765 C.E. the Atash Behram of Navsari was enthroned and no Adaraan fire is attached to it till today. Not only that, but the Bhagaria Mobeds of Navsari have not established a single Adaraan fire in their headquarters in Navsari till today.** The present Adaraan fires of Navsari were established by Mobeds belonging to the Minocher-Homji group, and not by the Bagharia priests of Navsari.

@@@@@@@@@@@@@@

**The Informal Adult Classes on Zoroastrian Religion & History, Toronto, CANADA
May 2007**

AGIARY

An *agiary* simply means a house or place where the fire is kept. It is an Indian word -- --*agni ari*-- which has been corrupted in Gujarati to *agiary*. It is a term that **can be applied to all three grades of fire** -- -- even the Iranshah in Udwarda can and has been referred to as an *agiary*, without diminishing its exalted status. In a personal communication, Dasturji Kotwal also confirms the same —

“The term ‘*Aginary*’ as a common term is used for all three categories of fire. The Sanjan Atash Behram is called ‘*Atashni Aginary*’ in old documents by Sanjana priests who tended the Atash Behram in Navsari.”

The Iranian term *Atash kadeh* is the corresponding equivalent to *agiary* in India. Thus for example, in 1823 William Ouseley noted that there were ruins of an ancient fire Temple on a hill near Isfahan, which was known as *Kuh i Atash Kadeh* “the Hill of the Fire-temple”. In *A Literary History of Persia*, Edward G. Browne, describes a place that he noticed in 1888 as “a curiously shaped hill called the *Atash-gah*, on which, as its name implies, there is said to exist a ruined Fire-temple.” **Thus it can be seen that at different points in history, a variety of terms have been used to describe a fire-temple irrespective of the grade of fire.**

In India, by general usage of language, the term *agiary* has now come to become synonymous with the third grade of fire i.e. the *dadgah*. A person praying in an unfamiliar *agiary* may have to ask someone beforehand as to the category of fire housed therein to make the appropriate selection when reciting the *Atash Niyesh*. Invariably in most cases, it is the third category of fire.

According to Mary Boyce, there are early references to the word *agiary* by European travelers in 17th century India. John Ovington, in 1689, describes the celebration of the gahambars and notes that the Parsis had not lost their Zoroastrian zest for enjoyment and were great toddy drinkers, substituting this fermented palm juice for the wine of their mother country. His predecessor, an English chaplain by the name of Henry Lord, in a reference to the practice of “*atash –zohr*”, states that whenever the Parsis eat any fowl or flesh, “they carry some part of it to the “*agiary*” or temple, as an offering to appease God, that for the sustenance of man they are forced to take away the life of his creatures.”

DAR-E-MEHER

The word *Dar-e-Meher* or *Dar-i-Meher*, is of Iranian origin. According to Mary Boyce, during the reign of Shah Abbas the Great (1587 – 1628) in Kerman, there were evidently still some Zoroastrians of substance who were able to give generously in charity. In 1858, a Persian inscription was discovered “in flowery verse” on an “elegantly carved” marble slab in an old building of a *Dar-e-Meher* at Kerman which had remained unnoticed and neglected until then. That inscription was transcribed, translated and interpreted by Professor Mary Boyce. According to the inscription, the *Dar-e-Meher* (*Khane-yi Mihr*) was erected by one Rostam of Bundar, son of Mihragan. The inscription records that he erected “this place of worship at his own costs for pious prayers”. The inscription praises Shah Abbas who is mentioned along with Faridun and Noshirvan. This is because Shah Abbas is still gratefully remembered by the Zoroastrians in Kerman and Yazd for protecting them from the harshness of local governors.

According to JJ Modi, fire-temples generally have a place or a set of apartments attached to them for the performance of inner liturgical ceremonies. These special places came to be known at first as the *Dar-e-Meher*. Even though these places are attached to the temple itself and are actually a part of the main fire Temple, it came to be that the whole religious building including the main chamber of the sacred fire came to be called the *Dar-e-Meher*.

It must be noted that all fire-temples do not necessarily have the apartments for the performance of the inner liturgical services attached to them. For example the Atash Behram or the great fire Temple at Navsari does not have the *Dar-e-Meher* attached to it but it is in a separate building. But that is more the exception than the rule and therefore generally speaking the entire complex is sometimes referred to as the *Dar-e-Meher*. But more often than not, a *Dar-e-Meher* is usually used for the sacred fire of the third grade.

The term *Dar-e-Meher* is made up of *Dar* (Avesta *dvara*, Sanskrit *dvara*, German *Thur* or *Thor*, English door) and *Meher* which is a later form of the Avesta *Mithra*. So the term generally means the door or the porch of *Mithra*. In Zoroastrian angelology, *Meher* is the Yazata presiding over light and justice. Indeed at one time in history, fire temples were the seat of justice similar to the courts of today. Even at the present time, in predominantly Hindu

India many legal documents have the word “*Mitra*” reverently inscribed at the top of the page.

The term *Darbe-Mehr* (or more correctly *Darb-e-Mehr*) is unfamiliar to Parsi Zoroastrians from the Indian sub-continent. According to Dasturji Kotwal ---

“The word '**darb**' is an older form derived from the Avestan word 'dvar', and **it is more preferable than the later form 'dar' which we Parsis generally use.** The letter 'b' is dropped in later languages such as Pahlavi and Persian, whereas it is retained by the Parsis of Iran in their colloquial language, showing affinity with the Av. letter 'v' in 'dvar'.”

The *Darb-e Mehr* attached to the Navsari Atash Bahram is meant solely for the ceremonies performed by the Boewaras in connection with the Atash Bahram for retaining the Khub or ritual Amal. The famous *Vadi Dar-e Mehr* is used exclusively by the Bhagaria priests for all Pawmahal ceremonies commissioned by the community.”

Again according to Dasturji Kotwal ---

“It is better to call a place of worship **in which there is no permanently burning fire** a *Darb-e Mehr* or *Dar-e Mehr*, i.e., the Court of the Lord of Rituals, since rituals are generally performed in the Hawan Gah which is presided over by Mehr Yazad.

There is no Agiary in India which does not house **a consecrated fire in the Gumbad** for general worship. However, old Agiarys of Gujarat did not house, in the beginning years, a consecrated fire. It should be remembered that all Agiarys in India have Dadgah fires in the Urwisgah for ritual purposes and **a fire of any of the three categories in the Gumbad as a fire of worship for devotees** as a medium to send their messages to Ahura Mazda.”

Conclusion

In the North American context, instead of splitting hairs over interchangeable terminology, the preferred course would be to call any place of Zoroastrian worship a *Darb-e-Mehr* or *Dar-e-Mehr* as Dasturji Kotwal has rightly pointed out. **As the name Agiary is of Indian origin and is interchangeably applied to all three grades of fire, it is best to avoid it for the unnecessary confusion that it causes and also because it is not a familiar term to Zoroastrians from outside the Indian subcontinent.** If and when the time comes to go about establishing a proper place of worship and because it is not possible or practical to carry out the intricate rituals of the inner ceremonies under our present local circumstances, one should be guided by the advice given by Dasturji Kotwal below---

“When the Parsis of London wanted to consecrate a Dadgah fire and sought my advice, I formulated a scheme for consecrating a Dadgah fire in the absence of Pawmahal ceremonies. The scheme is available in a booklet which can be had from the London Association.”

The said booklet is now available for reference purposes on request. It is always prudent to follow the advice of recognized authorities and scholars in these matters rather than armchair scholars. **The entire text of the above paper has been thoroughly reviewed and approved by Dasturji Kotwal.**

