



THE MAZDAYASNI CONNECTION

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Adar nu Parab - Atash nu Varas

By MALCOLM BHESANIA

Adar Roj of Adar Mah is known *Adar nu Parab*. Parsis in India and elsewhere celebrate this day as *Atash nu Varas* or *Chula nu Varas*. The celebrations begin one day earlier, on Dae-pa-Adar Roj of Adar Mah.

While growing up in the 60s in Dadar Parsi Colony, Mumbai, I lived in a building that was once a two-story (ground + one) bungalow built by my great-grandfather (my mom's maternal grandfather) **Rustomji Sorabji Contractor**. As a successful businessman, he had contributed to many philanthropic causes for the community. Even today, while praying in the colony's Rustom Framna Agiary, devotees sit on the strong wooden benches that were commissioned by Rustomji over 80 years ago, and bear plaques with his name "R. S. Contractor".

Behind the bungalow was a structure that housed a series of 4 large rooms, which we called the “outhouse”. These rooms, my mom told me, were used during the **Muktdad** or **Farvardegan** days. Flower vases for the dear departed were setup on marble-topped metal tables in the main room, whose floor was covered with large stone tiles and whose walls were plastered with a coat of lime (*chuno*) that was re-applied every year. A platform ran along the length of one wall on top of which was a built-in wood-fired stove (*chulāvati*). The small wash area (*mori*) that stood in one corner was used for filling the vases with fresh water every day and for washing the flowers and the utensils that were used for the rituals. Mobeds would come daily for 18 days to recite prayers and perform rituals for the departed and an atmosphere of piety and prayers, mingled with the fragrance of the sandalwood and *loban* offered to the fire, would permeate the atmosphere.

By the time I was born, Rustamji and most of the members of the large family had either passed away or moved away. We - my parents, *mamaji* (my maternal grandmother), my brother and I - continued to reside on the ground floor of the building, which now had new owners. Muktdad was no longer held in the outhouse, having been shifted to the neighboring Agiary a long time ago, and the main room was empty and locked for most of the year.



Every year, the onset of Adar *mahino*, brought a sense of excitement and a flurry of activity. The main room of the outhouse was unlocked, dusted, scrubbed and made spotless in preparation for the celebration of **Atash nu Varas** or **Chula nu Varas** - birthday of Atash - which commenced on Dae-pa-Adar Roj of Adar Mah.

In the Ujiran Gah of Roj Dae-pa-Adar, we would light the coals and when they were red-hot, arrange them in the *chulāvati*, and keep the Atash burning by feeding it with *kathi* (wood of the plane tree), *sukhar* (sandalwood), *tācho* (wood chips) and *loban*.

A *toran* (flower garland) was hung outside the room. The wall behind the stove (*chulāvati*) was decorated with hand-drawn images of a

fire-censer (*afarganyu*), ladle (*chamach*) and a pair of tongs (*chipyo*) using a paste made of *kum-kum* (vermilion powder) and *harad* (turmeric) powder. Around these, the words, “*Shree Pak Dadar Ahura Mazda ni madad hojo ji*” – “May we receive Pak Dadar Ahura Mazda’s help (blessings)” were written in Gujarati. Chalk



patterns (numbering 7 or 9) were placed around the stove and a red *tili* (mark) was placed on the stove, which was garlanded with marigold flowers. The Pahlavi text, **Bundahishn**, gives a list of flowers associated with each Yazata. The marigold flower is associated with Adar Yazata.

A metal tray containing *sukhar* and *loban* was placed next to the *chulāvati*.

Some Parsi homes also placed a *ses* (metal tray) with flowers, fruits, *mithai* (sweets) and a *divo* (oil lamp). Sometimes, sweet dishes like *ravo* or *sev* were also specially made for the occasion.

Family members would perform the *kusti* ritual and recite Sarosh Baj, Ujiran Gah, Atash Niyesh, Ardibehesht Yasht and any other prayer, while offering *sukhar* and *loban* to the fire. After the prayers were done, the room would be closed. However, we would enter the room occasionally to feed the fire. Before retiring to bed, prayers were again recited facing the fire. Mom and *mamaiji* woke up at regular intervals in the night to ensure that the fire burned continuously throughout the night and into the next day.

The next day was Adar mah and Adar roj – **Adar nu Parab**. We would recite our morning prayers before the Atash and ensure that the *divo* and Atash burned all day. The fruits and food in the *ses* that were blessed by Adar Yazad and Ardibehesht Ameshaspand were eaten on this day. At the end of the day, the Atash and the *divo* were allowed to burn out and the room was closed and locked to be reopened the next year to celebrate **Atash nu Varas**.

Today, several years later, more floors have been added to the main building, and the ‘outhouse’ with its 4 rooms has long been gone – demolished to make room for car parking garages. However, the pleasant memories of celebrating **Atash nu Varas** and the atmosphere of piety, reverence and tranquility that prevailed for these two days, can never be erased. ■

Practical Guidelines: What to do on these days

By SILLOO MEHTA

Thursday, April 20 – Roj Dae-pa-Adar, Mah Adar

- Prepare for the **Adar nu Parab** on the next day.
- In the Ujiran Geh, start a fire in an *afarganyu* by putting some lit coals on it and place it in a safe place. If this is not possible, then a *divo* (oil lamp) can be substituted. Do your *kusti* and recite the Sarosh Baj, Ujiran Geh and Atash Niyaaesh. You may add the Ardibehesht Yasht or any other prayer. However, it is important to ensure that the Atash or the *divo* does not extinguish and burns all night through.
- Fasli **Ardibehesht** mah begins on this day.

Friday, April 21 – Roj Adar, Mah Adar – Adar nu Parab

- Keep the Atash or *divo* glowing all day.
- After your *farajyat* (*obligatory*) prayers, recite at least one Atash Niyaaesh.
- This day commemorates the *salgreh* of the following:
 1. Iranshah Atash Behram at Udwarda (the real *salgreh* is as per Fasli calendar.)
 2. Banaji Limji Agiary, Fort, Mumbai
 3. Mithaiwalla Agiary, Grant Road, Mumbai
 4. Patel Agiary, Andheri, Mumbai
 5. Gabba Adaryan, Billimora
 6. Jivanji Mistry Adaryan, Syed Pura, Surat
 7. N. B. Chokshi Dar-e-Meher, Panchgani

Saturday, April 22, Roj Avan, Mah Adar

- **Fasli Ardibehesht Parab. Recite the Ardibehesht Yasht.**

Notice that the two months dedicated to Atash – Shahenshahi (Adar) and Fasli (Ardibehesht) run parallel as if to guide us to venerate the consecrated Padshah Sahebs saying, “*Bhanee ghanee nay Nature na blessings ni loot chalavo*” – “Accumulate the blessings of Nature by reciting manthra prayers (before Atash Padshahs)”.

May all Padshah Sahebs bless us as we remember them! ■