Parsi Customs, Traditions and Rituals for the Youth of the 21st Century



By

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The Fravashi of Light on the front cover is dedicated to the memory of my dear husband Perviz Dubash, a true Zoroastrian in every aspect of his life, who dreamt of a coloured winged 'Fravashi of Light'. He made his dream a reality by developing the design with the help of a graphic designer.

PREFACE

This book is dedicated to my paternal aunt. She carried out daily religious practices and traditions throughout her life, which made me realize the importance of customs, traditions and rituals as being an essential part of our daily lives.

I visited her on the morning of my youngest daughter's Navjote as she was unable to attend. She gave me a gift card with the words that read, 'I should continue to row my life's boat (journey), just the way I won her heart with my actions, love and affection.' Her faith and dedication to our religion made me realize how important it is to carry on this path for the benefit of our younger generation.

I always felt that ceremonies and customs often symbolize moral principles and beliefs of a religion. Customs and rituals vary, but the spiritual values remain the same.

As years passed by and living in a foreign land (Melbourne, Australia), I continued my daily religious practice and performed simple ceremonies and customs at home as practiced by my parents and grandparents and hoped my children and future generations would follow this path.

This book is not a religious guide. It is for the younger generation who wish to continue with the customs, traditions and rituals practiced by the Parsis of India, Persian Zoroastrians who migrated from Iran to Sanjan, Gujarat, India between the eighth and tenth century. They continued with their religious practices to keep their identity as well as adopt the local language, some traditions and dress of Gujarat, India.

I am not familiar with the customs and religious practices of our ancestors in Iran, and therefore are not included in this book.

There are many ways of performing different customs and ceremonies daily and on auspicious occasions. To the reader the

ceremonies may seem inaccurate or incomplete, but this book contains simple basic customs practiced by my ancestors and knowledge from various books, websites and religious lectures.

In preparing this book, my sincere thanks to Ervad Kaivan Antia for his help in the matters of religious rituals.

Ahura Mazda’s blessing.

Nergish Dubash

August 2024

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Chapter I - Significance of Religious Items

Prophet - Zarathushtra



It is a custom for Zoroastrians - Parsis to display a picture frame of Zarathushtra on the wall at the entrance of their home or where they perform their daily prayers.

Fravashi - Asho Farohar



The Fravashi is a symbol of Divine essence, Guardian Spirit of a person.

The divine light of Ahura Mazda accompanies each individual soul - Urvan and is the Guardian Angel spirit - Fravashi of every human being.

Ahura Mazda has given every individual soul a free will to choose between good and evil whose actions on this earth are judged at death by Garothman Behest, House of God.

According to Zoroastrian doctrine the purpose of life on this earth is to live in such a way that an individual follows the path of Ashoi - righteousness, with good thoughts, good words and good deeds through which the soul can make its own spiritual progress and attains union with Ahura Mazda.

The Fravashi is said to represent the three principles of Zoroastrianism of Good Thoughts - Humata, Good Words - Hukhta and Good Deeds - Havarshta. It is familiarly known by Parsis as the 'Farohar'.

Divo - Oil light

A divo is an essential item used daily in fire temples and in a Parsi home. A traditional metallic or glass holder is cleaned and used daily, containing oil or ghee and a wick made of cotton is used to light the divo.



It signifies strength and goodness and protects us from evil and darkness.

It represents the presence of divine light and reminds us to follow Ahura Mazda's path of righteousness and to avoid negative energy and evil in this world.

Afarganyu - metallic urn for burning sandalwood and loban.

Fire is an important symbol of worship for Zoroastrians in fire temples and in family homes. Celestial fire is the release of Ahura Mazda's own Divine Light, hence in reality we are truly worshipping the significance behind it, which is, fire serves as an emblem of God - Ahura Mazda.



A small afarganyu - metallic urn is placed on the prayer table to burn sandalwood and incense - loban at home during prayers. Some Parsis instead light an incense stick - agarbatti before commencing daily prayers. After prayers some take the lit afarganyu with loban and circulate it around the whole house to purify the home and for blessings of Ahura Mazda - loban feravanu.

Khordeh Avesta - Zoroastrian prayer book



The oldest Zoroastrian religious scriptures as preserved are generally known as 'Avesta.' A section of this Avesta is known as the 'Khordeh Avesta' and includes all prayers for daily use by Zoroastrians except the Yasna, Visparad and Vendidad prayers.

Sudreh and Kusti



The Navjote ceremony is an initiation of a child of Parsi or Irani parents into the Zoroastrian religion and performed between the ages of seven and eleven years of age. The ceremony consists of the investiture of the child with a white sacred cotton - muslin shirt - the 'Sudreh' and the sacred thread made from lamb's wool - the 'Kusti'.

The significance of Sudreh and Kusti is detailed in Chapter IV - 'The Initiation Ceremonies and Customs'.

Head cover - Topi for men and mathubanu - scarf for ladies



Zoroastrians and all Parsis cover their head whilst praying, attending religious ceremonies and in an Atashbehram, Agiary or Dare-Mehr. It is necessary for Zoroastrians to cover their head as it is essential to

maintain the peaceful exchange of spiritual energies which happens all the time in a human being, but more so during prayers.

The men wear a topi - cotton fabric cap preferably black or maroon and women wear a mathubanu - white muslin scarf, but now colourful scarfs are also worn.

Zoroastrian Calendar

There are three calendars that the Zoroastrians follow, Shenshahi, Kadmi and Fasli.

The Parsis of India mostly follow the Shenshahi calendar and celebrate the new year around August.



The calendar year consists of twelve months and each month has thirty days known as Roj and each Roj has a name. As thirty days in twelve months equal to 360 days, the last five Gatha days added to the twelfth month make it 365 days a year.

The calendar does not include leap years. That is the reason why Navroze - New Year Day has now shifted from the original Vernal Equinox Day in March and is celebrated around August.

Kadmi calendar is used by Irani Zoroastrians in Iran and India.

Some Zoroastrians also follow the Fasli calendar in Iran and India.

Pomegranate - fruit used in various religious ceremonies

The pomegranate fruit is a symbol of immortality, fertility and prosperity.



Amongst the Zoroastrians the pomegranate fruit is used in various prayer ceremonies like Jashans and other religious ceremonies.

It is also of religious and cultural significance in Iran. Traditionally, offering pomegranate juice after prayer is considered as blessings against evil forces - Ahriman and to bring good luck.

The leaves of the pomegranate tree are also used in the Nahn ceremony.

Flowers - Garlands, bouquets and torans



Flowers represent joy, fragrance and natural beauty and have a very important use in our religious ceremonies.

Flowers and plants are also seen in the stone carvings of Persepolis, Iran.

Flowers are used for all religious ceremonies like Jashans and Muktad prayers.

On auspicious occasions fresh flower garlands and bouquets are used for sagan for an individual whose ceremony is to be performed, for example, birthday, Navjote, wedding. Garlands are also used to

adorn a Ses and photo frames of Zarathushtra and departed family members.

Torans - On auspicious days, a string of flowers is used to adorn the front door of a home, the front entrance at a venue and stage decorated with flowers for an occasion, such as Navjote or wedding.

Rose petals along with grains of rice are used for Tandarosti - benediction prayers after a Navjote and wedding ceremony.

Ses - significance of a Ses in a Zoroastrian home

All Zoroastrian families generally have a Ses in their home. A Ses is a blessing given on all auspicious occasions. Items used in a Ses are of a symbolic manner. It combines the giving of material things with spiritual blessings. Some of the items in a Ses have a distinctively Indian character and some symbols from ancient Iran. Rituals and customs are evident from the symbolism of the auspicious items that are in a Ses as explained below.



Importance of items used in a Ses.

All items in a Ses are made of German silver - metallic material.

The Ses is a round metallic silver tray which holds the items.

Soparo is a conical shape receptacle which is filled with large sugar crystals which represents sweetness.

Gulabaz is a receptacle filled with rose water, fragrance to be spread around - sprinkle of good deeds.

Pigani receptacle containing vermillion - kunku paste tili used on forehead as a blessing and successful life.

- Vertical tili for men signifies rays of sun and hence energy and giving.
- Round tili for women signifies the moon and hence beauty and receptivity.

Items used in a Ses are:

- Vermilion - kunku paste tili used on forehead as a blessing and successful life.
- A small bowl of sweet yogurt.
- Coconut - signifies inner and outer worlds.
- Flowers - garland of flowers - joy and fragrance.
- Rice - abundance.
- Wheat and green lentil - moong used only for some ceremonies.
- Large sugar crystals - sakar - sweetness - two pieces - one for the Ses and one for the recipient.
- Unshelled almond - badam - represents virtue - one piece.
- Turmeric root - haldi gathia - fertility and prosperity - one piece.
- Dried dates - kharak - represents resilience - one piece.
- Areca nut - supari - suppleness and strength - one piece.
- Betel leaf - paan - nature and nourishment - two leaves.

Chapter II - Significance of Customs, Traditions and Rituals

Jashan

Jashan ceremony is performed to celebrate or commemorate a joyous occasion or an important event. It is performed for the wellbeing of both the spiritual and physical worlds.

Jashan ceremonies can be performed outside of an Atashbehram, Agiary, Dare-Mehr, in community venues or individual homes. It is performed by one, two or more priests.

The main types of Jashans performed are:

- Jashan connected with seasons or seasonal festivals like Gahambars and various festivals.
- Zinderavan Jashan, a thanksgiving Jashan which is performed to celebrate or commemorate joyous occasions either at community gatherings on auspicious days or individual family celebrations.
- Jashan - in honor of the departed souls.

Basic items needed are a white sheet on which to perform the Jashan ceremony, Afarganyu - fire urn, a chamach - ladle and chipyo - a pair of tongs for placing sandalwood and loban on the atash - fire, divo, couple of metallic plates for flowers for Afringan ceremony and other items, milk, water, pomegranate and five or seven fruits, nuts, malido and papri - little fried purees. Daran - wheat flour flat bread is used in certain prayer ceremonies.

Main prayers for Gahambars and Zinderavan Jashans performed by Priests are:

- Atash Nyaish are devotional prayers said when consecrating the fire for the ceremony, followed by Doa Nam Setayashne prayers in praise of Ahura Mazda.
- Followed by Afringan ceremony as dedications to Ahura Mazda's creations and blessings and to spread the spiritual strength to all present and concluded with Afrins.
- Doa Tandarosti prayers - the concluding prayers are blessings of strength, good health and happiness to be extended to all present and all humanity.
  In private family Jashans, individual family members names can be mentioned in the Doa Tandarosti prayer.
- At the conclusion of a community Jashan the members together recite a humbandagi prayer of two Yatha Ahu Vairyo and one Ashem Vohu.

The fruits and sweet items are shared by all.

Note: *Items used for prayers - flowers, milk, water, fruit peel to be disposed of in the garden and not in a household garbage bin because of the sanctity inherent in them on account of the ritual performed over them.*

Gahambar

Gahambar is a community event celebrated by the performance of a thanksgiving Jashan ritual followed by lunch or dinner assisted by the members in the true spirit of unity, harmony, forgetting differences and working towards a common end of progress and prosperity in the community. Generous Zoroastrians sponsor a Gahambar for an individual, or in memory of their departed ones, or simply as a religious act.

In celebration of the six creations of Ahura Mazda, each of the six Gahambars is celebrated during the year for a period of five days each. They are celebrated on five particular Roj - days, in the months

of Ardibehesht, Tir, Shehrevar, Meher, Dae and on the five Gatha days.

Nahn

The ancient Iranians placed a good deal of importance that the physical purity of the body is a step towards the purity of the mind and soul. Hence, Nahn is a physical and spiritual cleansing ritual.

It is performed by the family Priest with the individual who recites prayers with Nirang and pomegranate leaf, followed by the individual taking a bath and wearing new or clean clothes, after which the remaining prayer with the Priest, concludes the Nahn ceremony.

The main occasions of Nahn - purification ceremonies performed are before a Navjote and Marriage ceremony, women at the end of their period of accouchement.

The Bareshnum is often referred to as Nahn also, which is only required for Priest initiation who can then perform religious ceremonies.

The two occasions of Navjote and Marriage are important events in the life of a Parsi, and so mostly all go through this form of sacred bath in their lives.

The women at the end of the period of forty days of their accouchement ought to go through the purification Nahn ceremony, to enable them to resume all their normal daily religious and social activities which were restricted during the forty days.

It is a normal practice that ladies during their monthly cycle should abstain from attending any religious ceremonies or taking part in prayers, lighting divo or incense - loban during these days. It is recommended that at the end of the period, all items used are

washed before use and a bath by the individual, to enable her to resume all the daily religious activities.

A daily bath by a Parsi is an essential practice prior to prayers or attending a religious place or an event. Prayer is a process to purify the mind so physical cleansing at the commencement of prayers is essential.

Taro

The urine of the sacred Varasyo - white bull, that is not consecrated is called Taro. It is generally used for external application.

Nirang

Nirang is taro which is consecrated by a Nirangdin ritual performed by priests and is used in Nahn ceremonies.

Drops of Nirang are used for consumption along with chewing of pomegranate leaf especially during the Nahn ritual performed prior to a Navjote, wedding and other religious ceremonies. The sipping of the Nirang signifies 'to cleanse my body and purify my soul.'

If Nirang is not available, fresh pomegranate juice can be used as a substitute.

Sagan

Sagan is a blessing that is performed on all auspicious and joyous occasions like birthdays, Navjotes, and weddings. It combines the giving of material things with spiritual blessings. On all occasions the house should be cleaned and a divo should be lit in the home before the ceremony.

A Ses is used for the occasion. Items used for sagan in a Ses are vermilion - kunku paste tili, grains of rice, flower garland, two betel leaves - paan, one piece each of areca nut - supari, dried date -

kharak, turmeric root - haldi gathia, unshelled almond - badam, large sugar crystal - sakar, a spoon of yogurt, and a coconut - (prior to use for ceremonies the coconut should be adorned with a vermillion - kunku tili). It is performed on a patlo - flat wooden step stool decorated with chalk design and the person, preferably facing east, should always step up and down from the patlo with their right leg first.

The mother or a senior lady of the family performs the sagan to the person with a vermilion - kunku paste tili starting with right foot, then left and then the forehead, (vertical tili for men signifies rays of sun, round tili for women signifies the moon), a garland, a coconut, a small piece of sugar crystal dipped in yogurt to eat, and a cash gift or jewellery and finally a few grains of rice stuck on the tili and overna - sprinkle of rice over the head as a blessing for good luck and happiness. Once the person steps down a few drops of rose water are sprinkled on the patlo.

Doodh-ful

In many Parsi homes on auspicious days like children's birthdays, and Navjote or wedding morning, prior to bath, doodh-ful is performed on the recipient. A quarter cup of milk with a few rose petals, a few grains of rice and a drop of vermilion - kunku paste is mixed and poured, a few drops on the head followed by both the shoulders for blessings and good luck.

Achoo-Michu

Achoo-michu ritual adapted by the Parsis who migrated to India, is likely a version of the espand ritual of Iran. The items used in the Achoo-michu - like coconut, betel leaf and nuts, are adapted from Hindu customs and of no specific support to the religion. However, this custom has been added to the various rituals of a ceremony to protect the person against evil. It is performed after a Nahn

ceremony - ritual bath, especially prior to the Navjote or wedding ceremony, prior to entering the house after a ceremony and on other auspicious occasions. It is performed by the mother of the recipient or a senior lady of the family.

Items required are - a metallic plate - thali, a coconut, an egg, two betel leaves - paan, one each of areca nut - supari, dried date - kharak, turmeric root - haldi gathia, large sugar crystal - sakar, unshelled almond - badam, few grains of rice and a small glass of water.

The mother or a senior lady prior to a ceremony performs the achoo-michu ceremony to the recipient by circling each item clockwise seven times and left on the right side on the ground beginning with an egg, followed by the coconut, which is broken, and water sprinkled on both sides on the ground. Then all items - two betel leaves - paan, and one each of areca nut - supari, dried date - kharak, turmeric root - haldi gathia, large sugar crystal - sakar, and unshelled almond - badam are circled around seven times and left with the other items on the ground. Lastly, a small amount of water with few grains of rice is poured into the tray and circled seven times and sprinkled on both sides on the ground and then a few grains of rice showered over the recipient - overna, as a blessing and wishes for good health and happiness, after which the individual steps on to the stage for the ceremony.

Overna

At the conclusion of an achoo-michu ceremony a few grains of rice are showered on the recipient on auspicious occasions, before he or she steps on to the stage or enters the home after the ceremony for the first time, as a blessing and wishes for good health and happiness and the person is safe from any negative energy or bad luck coming to them.

The gesture of cracking of the knuckles by the mother from the recipient's head to her own temples, is to remove all evil from the recipient into herself.

Birthdays

Birthdays are very special days in a Parsi household, especially for a child.

It is a custom to start with chalk, toran - garland at the front door and a divo in the house. A sweet dish of sev - vermicelli or ravo - semolina with milk and a bowl of sweet yogurt is prepared for breakfast and special festive meals prepared by the family for the day.

Prior to bath, doodh-ful is performed on the child. A quarter cup of milk with few rose petals, a few grains of rice and a drop of vermilion - kunku paste is mixed and poured a few drops on the head followed by both the shoulders for blessings and good luck.

After bath the child is dressed in new clothes and made to stand on a patlo - flat wooden step stool, which is decorated with chalk. The mother performs the sagan with a vermilion- kunku paste tili on feet and forehead, a garland, a small piece of sweet with yogurt to eat, a coconut and a cash gift or jewellery and finally few grains of rice stuck on the tili and overna - sprinkle of rice over the head, as a blessing for good luck and happiness.

All family members also wish the child, followed by food and celebration.

Sari wearing ceremony

The sari wearing ceremony is the celebration of rite of passage for a young girl when she reaches puberty. It is usually performed between the ages of fourteen and seventeen years of age.

A sari and five red glass bangles placed in her Navjote ses is usually used for the occasion. Her birthday or an auspicious day is selected.

Prior to bath the doodh-ful is performed. After bath, dressed in normal wear, accompanied by five married ladies carrying the ses, exit from a side door of the house and walk up to the front entrance of the house where her mother performs the achoo-michu ceremony. She then steps on the patlo - flat wooden step stool, where her mother does a tili sagan and gives her the clothes to wear except the sari. She steps back on the patlo and the five married ladies assist her to wear the sari for the first time. A few grains of rice, a symbol of fertility, sprinkled with rose water, are tied in a knot in the corner of the sari before commencing to wear the sari. Her mother performs sagan with vermilion - kunku paste tili and then adorns her with garland, a bouquet of flowers, a piece of sweet - sugar crystal dipped in yogurt to eat, and jewellery or cash gift.

Family and friends then wish her good luck with gifts, followed by food and celebration.

Vardhyo - new home good luck

A simple good luck custom before moving into a new home, optional.

Do chalk, garland at door and kharaptu kunku on door sides. A small amount of vermilion - kunku and turmeric powder, dissolved in two separate bowls with little water to form a paste - five tilis one below the other alternating starting with vermilion - kunku, turmeric, kunku, turmeric and kunku.

In a small earthen pot or a metallic vase, put five tilis of kharaptu kunku, as explained above and put in two betel leaves - pan, and one each of areca nut - supari, dried date - kharak, turmeric root - haldi gathia, unshelled almond - badam and large sugar crystal - sakar, few grains of rice and a bit of water. Put a tili of vermilion - kunku paste on the coconut and place it on top of the pot and put a garland

around it. In a good position of the main room put chalk and place the pot in the middle of the chalk.

Do your kusti prayer, light a divo and burn incense - loban or incense stick - agarbatti to bless the home.

The family members enjoy a sweet of either sev or ravo or mithai - Indian sweets.

It is a common practice, but not necessary at a later day to organize a Jashan ceremony by the family priest to bless the home.

Chalk - powdered limestone designs on floor at entrance door to the home

Parsi chalk designs are similar to Indian Rangoli. The designs and motifs are auspicious and are believed to bring good luck to the family household.

Stencils made of thin tin with holes at the base are made with various designs of good luck, like Saal Mubarak, Happy Birthday, Navjote Mubarak, Shadi Mubarak. These are filled with limestone powder and with coloured sand to add to the design. Talcum powder can also be used if limestone powder is not available.

Traditionally, Parsis each morning after the house is cleaned, put chalk on either side of the entrance door or staircase in an area where no one can step on it, on a patlo - flat wooden step stool, on which sagan is performed and at the entrance of reception centers where functions like weddings, Navjotes are performed.

Only during the death of a family member, this practice is avoided for the first four days, or one month or as per individual family decision.

Chapter III - Birth

The announcement of a birth in the family is a joyous occasion.

Fifth month of Pregnancy - Panchmasyu

During the fifth month of the first pregnancy, the Panchmasyu ceremony is performed. The mother- in-law performs sagan to the expectant mother with a new set of clothes, a cash gift and a box of Pedas - Indian sweets made with milk solids - mawa, for the occasion. The same ceremony is afterwards performed at her parents' house.

Seventh month of Pregnancy - Agharni

The Parsis of India and abroad celebrate this joyful event with a custom called Agharni on an auspicious day in the seventh month of the first pregnancy.

Below is a simple guide to an Agharni ceremony.

The expectant mother who is dressed in a new set of clothes, traditionally a sari, steps on the patlo - flat wooden step stool, which is decorated with chalk design. The mother-in-law performs the traditional sagan with a tili - on the forehead of vermilion - kunku paste, a piece of sweet to eat and a garland of flowers to wear, along with a cash gift or jewellery.

Seven married women preferably with children, fills the expectant mother's lap with the traditional good luck items which are placed in a red cloth - a coconut, two betel leaves - paan, handful each of rice, wheat and green lentil - moong, one piece each of unshelled almond - badam, areca nut - supari, dried date - kharak, turmeric root - haldi gathia, large sugar crystal - sakar and a cone shaped sweet - larvo, and seven one dollar coins. For good luck, a small piece from tip of

larvo is broken and given to her to eat. The father-to-be is then invited to stand beside her, and sagan is performed to him with a tili, flower garland and a cash gift.

Friends and relatives also join in to wish them good luck.

The expectant mother then steps down, ties up the red cloth packet with the good luck items and accompanied by the seven ladies goes to her mother's house, where her mother welcomes her with achoo-michu ceremony at the door. She then puts the tied up red cloth packet into her mother's lap, which is then kept aside.

The same ceremony is repeated by her mother at their house.

The festivities are followed by sweets and refreshments for relatives and friends.

The women who participated in the ceremony from both families, are each given a small agharni larvo to take home.

Traditionally, in the olden days the expectant mother would stay at her parents' house from the seventh month onwards until the baby's birth. Nowadays, she returns to her home and keeps both the tied up red cloth packets, until the baby is born. She removes the sweets and the coins from the packets and the remaining perishable items are kept, which after birth are then disposed of in the sea or river, if possible, or buried in the garden.

The ceremony conducted by each family varies, according to their own family traditions.

It is normally performed in the morning or afternoon, not evening or after sunset. Sunday is the preferred day, but the family may choose whichever day is convenient to them.

Agharni Larvo is a cone shaped sweet made from chickpea flour, sprinkled with edible silver on it. It is a way of welcoming the infant with a Paro of sweets. Soparo - metallic item displayed in a Ses.

Significance of items used.
Coconut - inner and outer worlds, flowers - joy and fragrance, rice, wheat, moong - lentil - abundance, large sugar crystals - sweetness, unshelled almonds - representing virtue, turmeric root - fertility and prosperity, dried dates - resilience, betel leaf and areca nut - suppleness and strength.

Sixth day after Birth - Chatthi ceremony

This is performed on the sixth day after birth by the grandmother or an elder relative of the family in the evening.

Near the baby's cot a divo, oil light is lit and set on a table. A small metallic plate is filled with a new set of baby clothes, a piece of sweet or chocolate, a cash gift with seven coins, a new red pen and white writing pad with the infant's name on it. It is believed that the Goddess of Destiny writes the infant's destiny on this day.

Fortieth day Ritual bath - Nahn ceremony

Traditionally, for forty days the mother after childbirth is not allowed to mingle with the family and remain in a room and refrain from day-to-day activities. On the forty-first day the family priest would perform the Nahn ceremony - ritual bath, prayers with Nirang and pomegranate leaf followed by bath and then final prayers performed with the priest. After this ceremony the parents and baby would visit, if available, an Atashbehram or Agiary for the first time.

Third month Vadhavo - gifts for the baby

The paternal grandparents would visit the new family and bring a Ses with a set of clothes, jewellery, cash and toys, a silver cup or glass for the baby.

A similar ceremony called Zori Pori is performed by the maternal grandparents also, with gifts of a baby cot, clothes, jewellery, cash and toys.

Seventh month - Besna ceremony

This ceremony is performed when the baby is seven months old and can sit on their own. The infant after bath is dressed in new clothes and made to sit on a patlo - flat wooden step stool, which is decorated with chalk design. Seven Pedas - round Indian sweets made from milk solids - mawa are placed around on the patlo. A tili, garland sagan is performed, followed by gifts from family and friends.

Eleventh month - Pag Laddoo ceremony

The Pag Laddoo ceremony is performed when the baby is eleven months old and can take a few steps on their own. The infant, after bath is dressed in new clothes is made to step with right leg first, on the patlo - flat wooden step stool, which is decorated with chalk design. A tili, garland sagan is performed, followed by gifts from family and friends.

Special Laddoos are made of rice flour coating with sweet coconut filling for the occasion.

First Birthday

A birthday tradition is observed by Parsi families. Prior to bath, a doodh-ful tradition is performed. A quarter cup of milk mixed with a few grains of rice, rose petals, vermilion - drop of kunku paste is poured on the child's head and then on shoulders, followed by bath and is dressed in new clothes.

The child is made to step on a patlo - flat wooden step stool, which is decorated with chalk design, and sagan performed with vermilion

- kunku paste tili on feet and forehead, a garland, a small piece of sweet with yogurt to eat, a coconut and a cash gift or jewellery and finally few grains of rice stuck on the tili and overna - sprinkle of rice over the head, for good health and happiness.

Family and friends celebrate with food and entertainment.

Each year the birthday is an important tradition celebrated by most Parsis, especially for children.

Chapter IV - The Initiation Ceremonies and Customs

Athornan - Zoroastrian member of the Priest family.

Behedin - Parsis usage of Behedin denotes general members of the community as followers of the religion as per the ancient classification such as Ratheshtaran - warriors and Hutaokshan - artisans.

An initiation ceremony is an introduction to the religious faith by the performance of certain rites and ceremonies.

Navar, Martab and Dastur Ceremonies

A son of a priest family can only be initiated to become a priest, who is ordained through the Navar and Martab ceremony can then perform the Zoroastrian rituals. The initiation ceremonies are conducted under the guidance of a Mobed or Dastur in an Atashbehram or Agiary.

Navar is the first initiation into priesthood for the child after he has completed his Navjote. The Navar ceremony is made up of three stages, the Bareshnum, Gewra and the Navar ceremony. On completion of the several stages of the initiation ceremony he is initiated as a Navar - 'a new carrier of offerings.' Ervad is the title given to him. He can perform a few liturgical services like Jashan ceremonies, Navjotes and weddings (usually requires him to be married himself.)

Martab is the second initiation to priesthood which can be performed after two years or even later in life. The Martab ceremony consists of one Bareshnum. He can perform all the rituals

and prayers and perform the Yasna, Visparad and Vendidad ceremonies within the inner sanctum of an Atashbehram or Agiary.

Dastur as a title, are High Priests who conduct all ceremonies and are spiritual guides and teachers of the religion. There is no initiation ceremony to become a Dastur as it is with Navar and Martab, only a public Jashan ceremony where the community bestows the title of Dastur in recognition of his services.

Navjote

Navjote - Nav means 'new' and 'jote' means life.

Navjote ceremony is an initiation of a child of Parsi or Irani parents into the Zoroastrian religion. This is usually performed between the ages of seven and eleven years of age.

The ceremony is performed by the priest in the presence of family and friends.

The Avesta prayers a child should learn for the Navjote are Ashem Vohu, Yatha Ahu Vairyo, Kem na Mazda, Ahura-Mazda Khodae, Jasa-me Avanghe Mazda, Din-no-Kalmo and the Sarosh Baj prayers.

In the morning of the Navjote day, the child is made to have a bath with doodh-ful for good luck. A quarter cup of milk mixed with a few grains of rice, rose petals with a drop of vermilion - kunku paste is poured over the child's head and shoulders, followed by a complete bath and then dress in new clothes for the day. The child then steps on the patlo - flat wooden step stool, and the mother performs a sagan with tili, garland and a good luck cash gift.

The Navjote ceremony takes place at a hired venue or at home. It starts with a ritual bath - Nahn for the child where the child and the priest recite a 'baj' prayer, and the child is made to chew a couple of pomegranate leaves and sip the Nirang thrice while repeating certain prayers. The prayers signify cleansing of the body and purify

the soul. Before bath the mother performs an achoo-michu by circling an egg seven times over the child and breaks it near the shower door, followed by a purificatory bath with water. The child is dressed in a completely new outfit - white pyjamas, head cover - topi, a shawl to cover the upper body, leather slippers - sapat and brought on to the stage before the guests.

The mother performs the achoo- michu ceremony to the child who then steps on to the stage for the ceremony. The people on stage should be odd in number - one child plus two priests, or two children plus three priests, and so on.

The priest performs the ceremony. He first recites the Patet Pashemani, then makes the child stand on the patlo - flat wooden step stool, which is covered with a white sheet. The child recites the Din-no-Kalmo, a declaration of faith, and while reciting one Yatha Ahu Vairyo the priest makes the child wear the sudreh on the word Shyaothnanam.

The priest takes the kusti in his hands, stands behind the child who holds the priest's little finger and stands silently whilst the priest recites the beginning of the Hormazd Yasht. Then the priest and the child together recite the Ahura-Mazda Khodae prayers as the priest ties the kusti around the child's waist.

The priest and the child then recite the Jasa-me Avanghe Mazda prayers which states that the child accepts Asho Zarathushtra as his/her prophet and promises to follow the Mazdayasni religion of Ahura Mazda with good thoughts, good words and good deeds - 'Humata, Hukhta, Havarshta.'

The child is then made to sit on the patlo facing the audience and the priest performs sagan of tili, with coconut, flower garland, a bouquet and a token cash gift. The priest then recites the Doa Tandarosti - benediction prayer blessing the initiate with sprinkle of rice, coconut chips and rose petals. Rose petals are showered over the child at the conclusion of the ceremony.

The family members then help to dress the child in new clothes and jewellery.

The girl is made to wear preferably a white dress. A new sari is put in her Ses with five red bangles which she wears when she reaches puberty, preferably on an auspicious day or her birthday.

The boy is preferably made to wear a dagli and white pants after his Navjote ceremony.

The parents and child visit an Agiary, Atashbehram or Dare-Mehr if available, to offer sandalwood or offers sandalwood on stage where the Atash - Afarganyu is kept burning during the ceremony.

The families then thank the Priests with a cash gift, garland and shawl for the ceremony.

The ceremony concludes with wishes and gifts from family and friends followed by food and celebration.

On return from the celebration venue, the mother performs achoo-michu ceremony at the door before the child enters the house.

On completion of the Navjote ceremony, the Sudreh and Kusti should always be worn daily and only removed during bath and worn again reciting the Kusti prayers.

Significance of Sudreh and Kusti

Sudreh

Sudreh is a sacred garment made of one piece of white cotton - muslin cloth. The Sudreh is a symbol that reminds one of purity of life and righteousness.

The front and back are symbolic of past and future and related with each other through the present.

Two sleeves.

The front, girebaan, a pocket to store our deeds of righteousness on this earth. These meritorious deeds accompany our soul after death.

The back, girdo, reminds us of our obligations and duties to Ahura Mazda, our religion, society, our parents and to ourselves.

There are two tiris on either side.

Triangle tiri represents the importance of progress of our soul to the spiritual world with good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

The straight tiri reminds us to avoid wrong actions and shows we must continuously strive to move upwards. Vertical seam on the right side for women and left side for men.

The Sudreh must be worn next to the skin.

Kusti

The kusti is a sacred thread made from lamb's wool, signifies purity and innocence, and an individual's readiness to serve Ahura Mazda and keeps us within the limits of the path of righteousness.

Reciting the Ahura Mazda Khodae prayers it is worn on the sudreh around the waist in three rounds which denote good thoughts, good words and good deeds. It is tied in a double knot in the front and back, the ends of the kusti lars hang at the back.

The wool is spun and made into yarn and then woven on a loom. Ladies of Athornan - priestly family weave the kusti. The kusti is removed from the loom and handed over to the priest for consecration. The lars or tassels are attached at each end and the kusti is finally washed before use.

The kusti is a hollow tube which symbolizes the two worlds physical and spiritual. It is woven into 72 strands which represent the 72 chapters of the Yasna prayers.

There are three tassels at each end of the kusti. The 24 threads which make up each of the three tassels at each end of the kusti, represent 24 sections of the Visparad text. The six strands, each of twelve threads represent the six religious duties of a Zoroastrian. The twelve threads in each of the six strands represent the twelve months of the year and the six tassels, three at each end, represent the six Gahambars - seasonal festivals in the year.

Note: *Torn sudrehs can be used for domestic cleaning after removing the gireban and girdo, which can be burnt separately. Broken kustis can be buried in the garden. Old and torn prayer books, pictures of the Prophet, Asho Farohar, departed ones should be burnt and ashes strewn in the garden.*

The old practice of disposal of items in the sea or river should be avoided as this method of disposal causes pollution of the environment.

Chapter V - Marriage

Pre-wedding ceremony

Rupiyah Pehravanu - Marriage commitment ceremony

The commitment for a couple to get married is initially formalized by both families where the boy's family performs sagan, with a cash gift and a box of sweets to the couple and in return the girl's family reciprocate with sagan, a cash gift and a box of sweets to them.

Adravanu - Engagement

In the morning five or seven ladies from the groom's family arrive at the bride's house with a Ses carrying a full set of clothes, red bangles, a silver ring, cash gift and an engagement ring for the bride.

Another tray for the Dahi-machli ceremony containing a bowl of sweet yogurt, a few large sugar crystals and three or five fish made with milk solids - mawa, moulded in the shape of a fish, is brought for the family. The fish being symbolic of water signifies flexibility and adjustment in life. The custom of giving fresh fish is now seldom used.

A silver coin is placed in the family divo.

The bride's family greets them with achoo-michu ceremony at the door. The bride-to-be steps on the patlo - flat wooden step stool and the mother-in-law performs the tili sagan and presents her with a new set of clothes. She goes inside and changes into her new clothes, except the sari. She again steps on the patlo, after which the five or seven ladies assist in making her wear the sari. Before commencing wearing the sari, a few grains of rice, a symbol of fertility, sprinkled with rose water is tied to the corner of the sari. After which a garland, red bangles, a silver ring and a cash

gift/jewellery is given to her. She is then presented with a new set of clothes for the Dahi-machli ceremony.

Sagan is performed with garland, coconut and a cash gift to the ladies who participated in the ceremony.

After refreshments, the groom's family return with the bride to their home.

The bride's family accompanied by five or seven ladies with Ses and a tray of Dahi-machli items go to the groom's house where they are welcomed with achoo-michu ceremony. The bride's mother performs sagan to the groom, with a silver ring, a set of new clothes and cash gift for the Dahi-machli ceremony and an engagement ring for him. The bride then steps on the patlo, and they exchange engagement rings.

A silver coin is placed in the family divo.

Sagan is performed with garland, coconut and a cash gift to the ladies who participated in the ceremony, followed by refreshments.

Same evening the couple return to the bride's house for dinner where achoo-michu is performed. Before the groom leaves at night sagan is performed to him with a cash gift and a box of sweets.

Traditional four- day wedding ceremony

The traditional wedding ceremony is usually celebrated over four days. In modern times it is carried out in less time according to each family's convenience.

An auspicious day is chosen for the wedding, excluding Wednesday.

Madavsaro

The Madavsaro ritual involves planting of a young tree in a pot. It symbolizes planting love, good health and prosperity in the couple's life.

It is performed each at the bride and groom's house, respectively.

Sagan is performed to the bride who steps on the patlo - flat wooden step stool, dressed in a new dress or sari, tili, garland, coconut, cash gift, who then witnesses the madavsaro ceremony.

Sagan is also performed to the groom at his home with tili, coconut, garland, cash gift, who then witnesses the madavsaro ceremony.

The maternal uncle or male relative is dressed in a red turban, garland and tili sagan, accompanied by four married ladies to assist in the ceremony of planting of the tree. After the ceremony, a cash gift is given to the male relative and to the four ladies who assisted him in the ceremony.

It is performed mainly outside the main entrance or verandah.

The ground is decorated with chalk and a new clay pot with five tilis one below the other of kunku, turmeric, kunku, turmeric and kunku, half filled with soil is placed on the chalk. Usually, a mango sapling is used or instead a small fruit or lemon tree, which can be later planted in the garden, is then placed in the pot by the male relative with the help of the four ladies along with seven gold and silver sequins, two betel leaves - paan, large sugar crystal - sakar, betel nut -supari, unshelled almond - badam, dried date - kharak, turmeric root - haldi gathia, a handful of rice, wheat, green lentil - moong and a tablespoon of yogurt are also placed in the pot, reciting the Yatha Ahu Vairyo. The pot is then filled with the remaining soil. A garland is put on the tree. Seven cash coins tied in red material are tied to the branch of the tree. An egg and then a coconut is circled seven times over the tree and broken and kept on the right side on the

ground. The coconut water is poured in the tree. Five or seven fragrant incense sticks - agarbatti, or afarganyu with sandalwood and incense - loban is passed around reciting the Yatha Ahu Vairyo.

Note: Below ritual is only for traditional Ashirvad wedding ceremony

The mother of the bride/groom takes the sagan coconut from their hands and ties a Sutar-no-doro - cotton thread round the coconut whilst reciting seven Yatha Ahu Vairyo, one for each round, and at the end of the seventh round breaks the thread and twists both ends with a bit of haldi kunku twist and hands it back to them, who places it in a safe place, as this coconut is placed in his/her hand at the traditional Ashirvad wedding ceremony.

At the end of the ceremony, both the bride and groom are welcomed back into their house after an achoo-michu ceremony at the door.

List of items needed for the Madavsaro ceremony: -

- Two meters thin red material, with gold border for turban
- Chalk
- One new pot red or any colour - not black
- A small plant to sow in pot and a bag of potting mix to fill the new pot
- A packet each to be used as needed for various customs for the four days are turmeric powder - haldi, vermilion - kunku, betel leaf - paan, areca nut - supari, dried date - kharak, unshelled almond - badam, turmeric root - haldi gathia, large sugar crystal - sakar, handful of rice, wheat, green lentil - moong and a tablespoon of yogurt
- Eight coconuts - one for each Ses, one each for bride and groom, and one each for achoo- michu to pot plant and one each for achoo -michu after the madavsaro at the door
- Four garlands for each family - one each for bride and groom, one for the male member performing ceremony and

one small one for the pot plant and one small one for Ses - soparo

- Small red material to tie seven cash coins to the tree and a piece of red material to cover the base of the tree
- Seven incense sticks - agarbatti or afarganyu with sandalwood - and incense - loban.

Achoo- michu items to be kept ready in two separate thalis each, one for new pot plant and one at the door for the bride and groom after ceremony which comprises of one egg, a coconut, handful of rice, a small glass of water, two betel leaves - paan, and one each of dried date - kharak, areca nut - supari, turmeric root - haldi gathia, large sugar crystal – sakar and unshelled almond - badam.

After the Madavsaro there are some small ceremonies like Supra-ni-reet, Haldi-ni reet, Pori pathera-ni-reet, which in recent times are not performed by all families.

Significance of Items used.
Coconut - inner and outer worlds, Flowers - joy and fragrance, rice, wheat, moong - lentil - abundance, large sugar crystals - sweetness, unshelled almonds - represents virtue, turmeric root - fertility and prosperity, dried dates - resilience, betel leaf and areca nut - suppleness and strength.

Adarni

The Adarni ceremony is performed the next day or sometimes held in the afternoon on the same day of the Madavsaro and is when gifts are exchanged between both the families.

The groom's mother and five ladies visit the bride's home welcomed by achoo-michu ceremony. The groom's mother performs sagan and presents the bride with jewellery - usually the necklace from the wedding set, red bangles and a set of new clothes which the bride then dresses in.

The mother-in-law performs sagan to the bride's mother and presents her with a new set of clothes.

The ceremony ends with sagan - a cash gift, coconut and garland to the ladies, followed by refreshments for all.

They leave with the bride who stays at the groom's house until dinner and just before she returns home, sagan is performed to her.

The bride's mother and five ladies visit the groom's house welcomed by achoo-michu ceremony, perform sagan to the groom with gifts, a Ses with a full set of traditional clothes for the groom, a dagli, pair of white pants, feta - head gear, shawl, jewellery and a cash gift.

The bride's mother performs sagan to the mother-in-law and presents her with a new set of clothes.

Followed later the bride's family sends to the groom's house, furniture, linen, household items, except the lamp, table and wedding chairs are taken to the venue for the wedding ceremony.

The ceremony ends with sagan - a cash gift, coconut and garland to the ladies, followed by refreshments for all.

Khichree-nee-reet

The following day is a day of rest. It is called khichree-nee-reet where nothing special is done except khichree - rice cooked with turmeric and fish sas - gravy, is prepared for meals.

Varadh-patra Prayers

The third and fourth days the Varadh-patra prayers are performed by the family priests in an Atashbehram or Agiary with a recitation of the Baj and Satum prayers invoking the blessings of departed loved ones of the family, on the bridal couple.

Wedding day

In the morning of the wedding day the bride and groom have a complete doodh-ful bath for good luck. A quarter cup of milk mixed with a few grains of rice, rose petals with a drop of vermillion - kunku paste is poured over the head and shoulders followed by bath. After bath sagan is performed to them with tili, garland and a cash gift. The bride is also presented with jewellery as a wedding gift by her parents.

The wedding ceremony is usually held in the evening. It starts with the ritual bath - Nahn for both the bride and groom with prayers by the family priest.

The bride dressed in her wedding sari, traditionally white, jewellery from the wedding set, garland of flowers, a bouquet and coconut given to her at the Madavsaro, arrives at the venue where the father-in-law presents her with jewellery - a bracelet or earrings from the wedding set.

The groom dressed in traditional clothes, a dagli, pair of white pants, feta - head gear, shawl, garland of flowers, a bouquet and coconut given to him at the Madavsaro, arrives at the venue where the mother-in-law presents him with a gold/diamond ring or wristwatch.

This is followed by the exchange of shawls and cash gift envelopes between the parents of bride and groom.

In India the formalities for the marriage certificates are signed by the couple in the presence of the Priest, and overseas in the presence of a Celebrant.

An oil light - divo and an Atash - Afarganyu with sandalwood is kept burning on a side table, on the stage to signify the couple's spiritual union.

The groom is welcomed to the wedding stage by his mother who performs the achoo-michu ceremony. The bride follows with her father and is welcomed at the stage by her mother who performs the achoo-michu ceremony. The bride and groom sit opposite each other. The two priests and three married ladies from each family stand in a circle around them and two married male members one from each side of the family as witnesses.

The family members hold a white sheet between the couple preventing them laying eyes on each other. The priest ties their right hands together to symbolize unity. This ritual is called Ara-antar. The priests recite the Yatha Ahu Vairyo while passing the Sutar-no-doro - cotton thread around seven times with the help of the family members and after the seventh round the sheet is dropped, and the couple compete by throwing a handful of rice at each other. The one who throws the rice first, is said to be the domineering person.
The couple then sit side by side, the bridegroom seated on the right side of the bride.

The two priests stand in front of the couple flanked by the two male witnesses. The lead priest commences the ceremony and asks the two witnesses for their consent, after which they ask the marrying couple for their consent. The couple reply 'yes'- 'Pasande-Kardum' in front of the witnesses. This is repeated thrice. The main priest is then joined by the second priest in prayer, advising the couple to lead a blessed life with honesty and mutual respect and avoid negative habits such as deceit and jealousy. The priests then recite the Doa Tandarosti - benediction prayers with sprinkling of rice, coconut chips and rose petals on the couple wishing them good health and happiness.

Finally, the exchange of wedding rings concludes the ceremony.

Rose petals are showered over the couple at the end.

The families then thank the Priests with a cash gift, garland and shawl for the ceremony.

After the wedding, small ceremonies are performed.
The groom's hands are placed in a small pot of water which signifies washing of his hands by the bride's sister and in turn he gives her a cash gift - Haath Borvanu.
After which the bride's sister-in-law or close female relative puts a few drops of milk on the groom's shoes which signifies washing of his feet and in turn he gives her a cash gift - Pag Dhovanu.

If available, the couple then visit the Atashbehram, Agiary or Dare-Mehr to offer sandalwood and pray for Ahura Mazda's blessings for their new life together.

They then return to the reception where they are greeted and congratulated by family and friends, followed by food and celebration.

Varovar

This ceremony takes place on the eighth day after the wedding.

The bride visits her parent's home for the first time after the marriage. In the evening the son-in-law is invited to dinner.

At the time of leaving, sagan is performed to the couple with a cash gift and a tambri - a small metallic pot for storing water decorated with kunku tili, filled with some pedas - sweet made from milk solids - mawa, few grains of rice and one each of betel leaf and areca nut - supari, dried date - kharak, unshelled almond - badam, turmeric root - haldi gathia and a large sugar crystal - sakar. The pot is covered with a red cloth, with a coconut on top and a garland of flowers around it.

Chapter VI - Death

Final preparation of the body for the Funeral ceremony - Paidast.

When a Zoroastrian departs from this earth there are certain death rituals and prayers that are performed by the priest.

On the final last breath, the head of the deceased, if uncovered, should be covered with a white cap - topi for male and white scarf - mathubanu for female. An oil lamp is lit - divo, which should be kept burning for four days near the bed of the deceased and in both the ears of the deceased Ashem Vohu prayer should be recited by a family member prior to the body being taken for bath.

Sachkaar ceremony is performed in preparation for the first stage of a soul's journey to the spiritual world.

The deceased head should not point to the North at any time.

Items needed are two towels, a white sheet, clean used white wearing apparel to dress the body, a Sudreh and Kusti, a white scarf - mathubanu for ladies and a white cap - topi for men, and lego - a pair of white pyjamas.

The person attending to the deceased should recite Khshnaothra Ahurahe Mazdao and one Ashem Vohu and strip the deceased of his/her clothes. The Kusti should be washed and dried ready to be used again.

Taro if available, should be applied to the body and then duly sponged and cleansed with cold water and dried. If the deceased is male the body should be washed by male members and if female, by female members. After which the deceased head should be covered with a white topi for men and white scarf mathubanu for ladies and thereafter the Sudreh and a pair of white pyjamas are put on. A

piece of white cloth is tied round the forehead and knotted at the back. A family member then recites the Kusti prayer in his/her ears and ties the Kusti around the waist of the deceased. The person who ties the Kusti to the deceased should later recite the Patet Pashemani prayer.

Then two men who perform the Sachkaar ceremony perform their Kusti prayer, tie a piece of cotton tape about two meters long to their kusti. This is known as Paevand or connection which is for their own protection against germs. After completion of Sachkaar they both should perform the Baaj of Sarosh prayer.

A strip of white cloth, preferably made from old sudras, two meters long and around seven centimeters wide should be torn lengthwise and two people facing each other should twist the ends in opposite direction and brought together to be knotted. Five such strips - bandhs are to be made, and in the same way two small ones about sixty centimeters long, should be prepared. The five strips are placed on a stone slab, if available, and white sheet placed over it. The body is placed on the sheet and with hands and legs folded the right one on the left which are tied in two knots with the small bandhs each reciting the Yatha Ahu Vairyo prayer.

The whole body is then completely wrapped with the sheet except the face and ears should be kept uncovered. The five strips of cloth are then used to tie one round the neck, the second round both the hands folded and put on the chest, the third round the waist, the fourth round the thighs and fifth round the ankles. Whilst tying each bandh the Yatha Ahu Vairyo prayer should be recited, and two knots tied.

The two men who performed the Sachkaar should one by one with an iron nail five to seven centimeters long, draw three circles on the ground around the body, beginning from the head of the deceased and moving to the right reciting three Yatha Ahu Vairyo. Afterwards the nail should be left near the head of the deceased. This meant

that the ground within the circle was briefly set apart for the deceased.

This completes the Sachkaar ceremony.

The two men who have done the Sachkaar should apply taro, if available, bathe and dress in new or clean clothes.

Mainly in India and where available, after Sachkaar a dog preferably with an eye like spot above each eye is brought to gaze at the corpse, as some believe that the dog has the traits to detect whether life was really extinct before disposal of the body. This is called Sagdeed - 'seen by a dog.'

The Paidast - Gehsarna prayers are performed by two Priests. An oil light - divo is kept burning on a table near the head side of the deceased. After the Gehsarna prayers family and friends file past the corpse to do *sezdo* - pay their last respects.

A Zoroastrian funeral should be performed during the day and not after sunset.

For the first three days meat is not to be consumed by family members. Fourth day onwards you can include meat in your meals.

First four days prayers are Sachkaar, Gehsarna - Paidast, Uthamna, Sarosh-nu-Patru in honor of Sarosh Yazad, Pathli Ratnu Uthamna, Afargan-e-Daham at dawn of fourth day Charam, when soul departs and crosses over to the spiritual world, tenth day prayers, first month prayers - Masiso, and preferably every month on the Roj day of the departed person, end of first year prayer and Muktad prayers.

A Vendidad prayer ceremony is performed by a priest in an Atashbehram or Agiary, preferably during the first year of death.

A family member can pray the Satum-no-Kardo prayer for the departed soul as regularly as they wish.

Physical and spiritual purity are closely connected, hence the need to dispose of the departed quickly, to avoid contamination as little as possible of the material world.

Disposal of body in Tower of Silence - if available like in Mumbai, India, the body is exposed to the vultures as per Zoroastrian belief this is the most environmentally friendly way of disposing of the body without polluting the environment. Nowadays due to a lack of vultures, it is left exposed to the natural elements i.e. the sun.

Overseas and other cities where this is not possible, burial or cremation methods are used.

People who have attended the Paidast ceremony should also perform Kusti prayers before entering their home, then bathe and wear clean clothes.

It is a belief that very young children and pregnant women should avoid attending a Paidast ceremony. This is based on the logic that the Ahunavad Gatha prayers are very powerful and separates the consciousness from the soul of persons who are susceptible.

***Note**: This article is a simple practical guide for the Paidast - funeral ceremony mostly for overseas use. All funeral prayers and rituals are mainly carried out in India, in an Atashbehram or Agiary where all the Priest's guidance and facilities are available.*

Muktad ceremony

Celebrating Muktad is regarded as one of the important duties of a Zoroastrian.

Muktad days enhance contact between the physical and spiritual worlds.

The last ten days of the Zoroastrian calendar year are observed as the Muktad days which are the last five days of Asfandarmad Mahino, Ashtad Roj to Aneran Roj and the five Gatha days.

Previously Muktad was observed for eighteen days from Ashishvangh roj, added as part of the Muktad commemoration and extended up to Farvardin Mahino and Amardad Roj.

Muktad days are dedicated to remembering and paying homage to the Fravashis of our departed souls. These are days for the communal worship of all Fravashis who are believed to visit us on this earth and are also welcomed by families to their respective homes.

Individual family members of each departed soul, places a consecrated silver vase filled with flowers on a separate table or on a community table for the ten days of Muktad at an Atashbehram, Agiary or Dare-Mehr where prayers are performed by the priests. Food prepared for prayers is then distributed amongst the family members and the community.

Families can also observe Muktad at home for the ten days. The house is cleaned, and a suitable place reserved for the ten days. The consecrated vase with clean water and fresh flowers daily, is placed on a table, with an oil light - divo, and an Afarganyu to burn sandalwood and incense - loban or fragrant incense sticks - agarbatti is used. A cup of milk, water and a plate of food is also prepared daily and put on the table for the departed soul. The pleasant environment in the house is essential to welcome, remember and pray to our departed loved ones during these days, and on return they bless their family with good health and happiness.

The basic prayers performed by family members are:

- Kusti prayers
- Muktad- no- Namaskar
- Satum -no- Kardo
- First five days Framraot-no- Ha
- Last five days the Gathas.

Chapter VII - Recipes for Auspicious Occasions

The recipes below are written as a guide to various meals cooked on auspicious occasions. The recipes are mainly as taught and influenced by my mother and maternal grandmother who was a real 'Master Chef' at traditional Parsi cuisine.

The recipes for sweets and desserts would serve around six to eight people, but for community functions the ingredients and quantities can be adjusted according to the number of people attending a function.

The recipes for main meals would serve around four to six people but the ingredient quantities can be adjusted to each family's individual tastes and requirements.

I usually do not measure or weigh, just cook by my instincts, and by observing and guided by my mother and grandmother from an early age. Hence the ingredients used are an important part of the recipe, but the quantity used is a guide as accurate as possible. Please add or subtract ingredient quantities as per your individual tastes and requirements.

Sweets and Desserts

Ravo - Semolina

Ingredients

- 5 tbsp. of semolina,
- 1 tbsp. oil,
- Sugar to taste,
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg - cardamom powder,
- 3 tbsp. flaked/slivered almonds and sultanas,
- Two litres of milk or as needed to get the right consistency,
- 3-4 drops of rose or vanilla essence.

Method

Mix dry semolina in oil, then add the milk. Bring milk to boil, add sugar then simmer stirring constantly till desired consistency.

Add the essence and ground nutmeg - cardamom powder and mix well. Empty contents into a serving dish. Roast flaked or slivered almonds and sultanas and sprinkle on top before serving. Can be eaten warm or cold.

Sev - Vermicelli

Ingredients

- 2 packets fine roasted wheat vermicelli - Pakistan or Indian brand from Indian grocery store,
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 tbsp. oil,
- 3 tbsp. flaked/slivered almonds and sultanas,
- 1 tsp. vanilla essence,
- 1 tsp. nutmeg - cardamom powder.

Method

Empty sev in pot, crush into small sizes and mix with oil. On very low heat for few minutes, roast the vermicelli until golden brown in colour, then add sugar. Gradually pour in half a cup of boiling water, cover, and cook on very low heat. Add more water if not cooked - do not add too much water or it will stick together in chunks. Sprinkle nutmeg - cardamom powder and vanilla essence and toss gently with fork until all mixed in. Remove from heat and sprinkle with roasted almonds and sultanas before serving.

Malido - Sweet made from wholemeal flour

Made for prayers at Jashans and various religious ceremonies.

Ingredients

- 5 cups wholemeal flour,
- 3 cups sugar,
- 5 cups warm water,
- 400 gm ghee,
- 1 tsp. ground nutmeg - cardamom powder,
- 3 - 4 drops of rose essence,
- 3 tbsp. flaked/ slivered almonds and sultanas.

Method

In a pot burn two tablespoons of sugar till caramelized colour. This will give the malido a nice golden colour. Add the rest of the sugar and water and boil to a thin syrup consistency. Remove from stove and add in the essence and ground nutmeg - cardamom powder to the sugar syrup.

In a thick base vessel on low flame fry the flour in ghee till ghee starts to separate from the flour like tiny bubbles, then slowly add sugar syrup and constantly stir till syrup is fully absorbed and the mixture leaves the pan, to a soft smooth consistency. Pour in dish and sprinkle with roasted almonds and sultanas.

Mawa-ni-Boi - Sweet made with milk solids - mawa in the shape of a fish

Ingredients

- 4 litres of full cream milk make approximately 3 cups channa*,
- 2 cups full cream milk powder,
- 1-1/2 cups sugar,
- 2 tbsp. Ghee,
- ½ tsp green cardamom powder,
- 4-5 drops of rose essence,
- To make one Mawa-ni-Boi you will need 3 cups of channa.

**Channa - full cream milk brought to a boil and then separated with a tablespoon of yogurt, or approximately 15 ml of lemon juice or as required until the milk solids separate from the liquid. Drain the excess liquid from the milk solids.*

Method

Blend the channa whilst warm and milk powder well so no lumps of channa are visible and of smooth consistency. Add sugar, essence, cardamom powder and ghee. Mix well until all ingredients are thoroughly mixed. Empty the mixture in a thick base pot and cook on a very low flame, stirring the mixture to avoid it from sticking to pan or forming lumps until the mixture leaves the pan, to a soft smooth consistency. Make sure the mixture does not get too dry or crumbly. Then firmly set in a standard size fish shaped mould. Remove from mould when set, and if available cover with edible silver foil as decoration.

You can also make mawa -na- paan by setting them in heart shaped moulds and sprinkle with slightly course ground almonds and pistachios on top.

Lagan- nu- custard - baked custard

Ingredients

- 3 litres milk,
- 1 cup sugar - or to taste,
- 3 eggs,
- 1 tsp. vanilla essence,
- 1 tsp. nutmeg - cardamom powder,
- 1 tbsp. custard powder.

Method

In a large saucepan bring the milk to a boil then add sugar and simmer for approximately half to three quarters of an hour stirring constantly. Dissolve custard powder in a little cold milk and add in mixture - this gives the custard a firm texture. Add essence and nutmeg - cardamom powder, mix well and simmer for another five minutes. Let milk cool a bit and then slowly add beaten eggs, mix well and pour in dish. Bake in oven at 180 degrees till firm and set. Pierce the knife and if it comes out clean then the custard is set. Cool, cut into pieces and serve.

Kulfi - Ice cream - mango/pistachio

Ingredients

- 340 ml. evaporated milk,
- 300 ml thickened cream,
- 200 g of sweetened condensed milk or adjust quantity to your taste,
- ½ tsp. ground nutmeg - cardamom powder,
- 1 cup fresh or tin mango pulp for mango kulfi,
- 100 grams of coarsely ground pistachios for nut kulfi.

Method

In a bowl gently whisk the milk and condensed milk, when well mixed slowly add the cream and stir the mixture for a few seconds at a time until all ingredients are thoroughly mixed. Add nutmeg - cardamom powder and slowly fold in the mango pulp for mango kulfi or add in the ground pistachios for nut kulfi, stir mixture thoroughly, then pour in kulfi moulds or container and freeze till set.

Pickle

Lagan- nu- achaar - carrot and dry fruit pickle

Ingredients

- Half a kilogram of raw carrots,
- 2 tbsp. of raisins or sultanas,
- 10 dried apricots, 10 dried dates, 10 dried figs,
- 3/4 cup brown sugar - add or subtract as needed,
- 2 cups malt vinegar - add or subtract as needed,
- 1 tbsp. ginger - garlic paste,
- Salt to taste,
- Dry whole spices - one cinnamon stick, 8 cloves, 10 black pepper corns,
- Dry ground spices - 1 tsp. mustard powder, 2 tbsp. chilli powder, 1 tsp. turmeric powder.

Method

Grate carrots, add salt and mix and leave overnight in a bowl. Next day drain all liquid and spread on to a plate for a couple of hours to dry out the moisture.

In a pot add carrots and all spices, ginger - garlic paste, vinegar, sugar, dried fruits - raisins or sultanas and figs, apricots, and dates cut in halves, mix well, and cook on very low heat till ingredients soft and cooked to pickle consistency.

Remove from stove, cool and fill in an airtight glass jar.

Main Meals

Rotli - Roti - Indian flat bread

Ingredients

- 3 cups wholemeal flour,
- 4-5 tbsp. oil,
- Warm water,
- Salt to taste.

Method

Mix all ingredients in a bowl and slowly add warm water as needed and knead the dough until it is soft and pliable. Divide dough and make it into equal round balls. Using a rolling pin, roll evenly into a circular rotli and make sure the thickness is same throughout. Heat the tava - flat iron dish on medium high heat and cook the rotli for 15 to 30 seconds on each side until cooked. Apply a bit of butter or ghee at the end whilst hot for taste.

Dhandar - toor dal or yellow split pea lentils with Basmati rice

Ingredients

- 2 cups toor dal or yellow split pea lentils,
- 1/2 medium size onion,
- 3 cloves of garlic,
- 2 tsp. turmeric powder,
- 2 tbsp. cooking oil or ghee,
- Salt to taste.

Method

Wash and soak lentils for half an hour. Drain water, then add turmeric powder and four cups of water or as needed to the lentils

and bring to boil, then simmer until lentils are cooked. Add salt and blend to a smooth consistency. Fry finely diced onion and garlic and add in as garnish. Serve with boiled basmati rice.

Alternative Indian option for garnish - vaghar. Fry 3 cloves of garlic finely diced, few curry leaves, 1 green chilli finely sliced, 3-4 stalks coriander leaves finely chopped, 1/4 tsp. cumin seeds and 1/4 tsp. black mustard seeds, and then add to dal as garnish. Serve with boiled basmati rice.

Pulao - Rice cooked with either lamb or chicken.

Ingredients

- 1 kg lamb pieces or 10 or 12 chicken thigh fillets,
- 3 cups of basmati rice,
- 6 large onions,
- 3 potatoes,
- 3 eggs,
- 1 tbsp. ginger - garlic paste,
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste,
- 5-6 tbsp. plain yogurt,
- Few strands of saffron,
- 3-4 stalks of coriander leaves,
- 8-10 tbsp. oil or ghee as needed,
- Salt to taste,
- Dry whole spices - 2 cinnamon sticks, 4 cloves, 6 whole black pepper, 4 pods green cardamom, 1 black cardamom pod, 1 tsp. cumin seeds, 3 bay leaves, 3 pieces of aniseed,
- Dry ground spices - 1 tbsp. coriander powder, 2 tsp. cumin powder, 2 tsp. curry powder and 2 tsp. chilli powder.

Method

Fry three onions finely sliced and pieces of potatoes, finely chop coriander and slice hard boiled eggs and leave aside for later use and garnish.

Fry three onions finely chopped until golden brown along with the whole dry spices. Then add ginger - garlic paste and fry further for a couple of minutes, then add in all the dry ground spices, tomato paste and meat or chicken and continue to brown on low heat. Add one cup of water for chicken and two cups for lamb, bring to boil and simmer until meat or chicken is cooked and gravy is of a nice thick consistency.

Boil rice with salt to taste until just cooked consistency, drain and let it cool. Sprinkle turmeric or saffron colour powder on a third of the rice for colour.

In a broad-based pot or dish layer rice, then some meat or chicken pieces and gravy, a bit of fried onion, few potatoes and a couple of teaspoons of yogurt, continue with rice followed by meat or chicken until all ingredients are used. Lastly, sprinkle on top with crushed saffron or diluted in a tablespoon of warm milk and finely chopped coriander. Cover and cook in a preheated oven at 170 degrees for approximately three quarters to an hour until all ingredients are absorbed in the rice. Remove from oven, place in a serving dish and garnish with sliced eggs and serve.

Spicy Dal - toor dal or yellow split pea lentils

A traditional parsi accompaniment to pulao

Ingredients

- 3 cups toor dal or yellow split pea lentils,
- 1 large onion,
- 2 tomatoes,
- five to six pieces of diced pumpkin,

- five to six pieces of eggplant,
- 1 tbsp. ginger- garlic paste,
- 5 cloves of garlic,
- ¼ bunch of coriander leaves,
- 2 green chillies,
- few curry leaves,
- 8-10 mint leaves - optional,
- 4 or 5 stalks of freshly chopped fenugreek spinach, if available,
- Salt to taste,
- 6 tbsp. of oil or 3 tbsp. ghee,
- Dry ground spices - 2 tsp. turmeric powder, 2 tsp. chilli powder - or to your taste, 2 tbsp. cumin powder, 2 tbsp. dhansak powder, available from Indian spice shops, 1 tbsp. curry powder.

Method

Wash and soak lentils for half an hour, drain water then add chopped onion, tomatoes, pumpkin, eggplant, ginger-garlic paste, chopped coriander, chillies, fenugreek, mint and turmeric powder. Add three cups of water or as needed, and cook until lentils are soft, and vegetables are cooked. Blend thoroughly until all ingredients are mixed with lentils to a nice thick consistency.

In a small pan fry crushed garlic in oil or ghee, then add cumin powder and fry till golden brown and add it to the lentils along with salt and rest of the dry ground spices, bring to boil and simmer for fifteen to twenty minutes and serve with pulao.

Dhansak - Spicy Dal with meat

Dhansak is a traditional Parsi dish enjoyed by families mostly on Sunday using the same ingredients as above for the lentils but cooked with chicken or meat and is served with rice.

Dhansak is not prepared on auspicious occasions. It is usually prepared on the fourth day of a departed family member to commence the eating of meat on and after that day.

Sali murghi - chicken fillets or Sali boti - lamb pieces with potato fries

Ingredients

- 8-10 pieces of thigh chicken fillets or half kg lamb pieces,
- 2 medium sized onions finely chopped,
- 3 tbsp. oil,
- 1 tbsp. ginger - garlic paste,
- 1 tbsp. tomato paste,
- few strands of saffron,
- Salt to taste,
- Dry ground spices - 1 tsp. chilli powder, 2 tsp. cumin powder, 1 tbsp. coriander powder,
- Dry whole spices - 2 bay leaf, 1 cinnamon stick, 4 cloves, 3 pods green cardamom, 4 whole black pepper, 1 black cardamom pod, half tsp. cumin seeds, 2 pieces aniseed.
- Potato fries - Sali

Method

Fry finely diced onions with all the whole dry spices to golden brown, add ginger - garlic paste and fry for a couple of minutes, then add all the ground spices and lamb or chicken pieces and fry until nice golden brown in colour. Add one to two cups of water as needed and cook covered on low heat until meat or chicken is tender and of a nice gravy consistency. Add saffron and simmer for five minutes. Empty contents in a serving dish, sprinkle with potato fries - sali on top as garnish. Serve with Indian flat bread roti - rotli or sliced bread.

Aleti-paleti - chicken hearts and livers casserole

Ingredients

- Half kg. chicken hearts and livers,
- 1 large onion,
- 1 tbsp. ginger- garlic paste,
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste,
- 5-6 stalks of coriander leaves,
- 1-2 green chillies,
- 3 tbsp. oil,
- Dry ground spices: 1 tsp. chilli powder or to your taste, 1 tsp. turmeric powder, 1 tsp. dhansak powder, 1 tsp. curry powder,
- Salt to taste.

Method

Finely chop onions and fry in oil. When lightly fried, add ginger - garlic paste and continue frying for a couple of minutes, then add finely chopped chillies, coriander and all the dry ground spices, tomato paste along with the chicken hearts and livers and brown all ingredients thoroughly, add a cup of water and simmer gently until the hearts and livers are cooked and of a nice dry consistency. Serve with bread or Indian flat bread roti - rotli.

Lagan-nu-stew - mixed vegetable stew

Ingredients

- Oil, as needed,
- 2 medium size potatoes,
- 1 small, sweet potato,
- 1 small egg plant,
- 4 pieces of pumpkin,

- 250 grams of mixed frozen vegetables - peas, corn and carrots,
- 1 onion,
- 1 medium size tomato,
- 3 cloves garlic,
- 5-6 stalks of coriander leaves,
- 2 tbsp. malt vinegar,
- 2 tsp. sugar,
- 2 tbsp. slivered or flaked almonds - optional,
- Dry ground spices - 2 tsp. cumin powder, 1 tsp. curry powder, 2 tsp. chilli powder,
- Salt to taste.

Method

Chop into small pieces potatoes, sweet potato, egg plant and pumpkin. Fry in shallow pan with little oil until tender and keep aside to add in later.

In a vessel fry chopped onion and grated garlic till golden brown. Add cumin, curry and chilli powder, chopped coriander, diced tomato, frozen vegetables and salt. Add half a cup of water, cover and let it simmer for approximately fifteen minutes, until cooked and thick gravy like consistency.

Add in all fried vegetables, vinegar, sugar, cover and simmer for a few minutes until the fried vegetables are fully cooked and all liquid has been absorbed, a nice dry consistency. Remove from stove and garnish with slivered or flaked almonds - optional.

Tarkari-par-ida - mixed vegetable with egg

Ingredients

- 3 potatoes,
- 2 zucchinis,

- 1 medium size onion,
- 1 tomato,
- 1 small, sweet potato,
- 1 tsp. ginger - garlic paste,
- 3-4 stalks of coriander leaves,
- 1-2 green chillies,
- 3 eggs,
- 3 tbsp. oil,
- Dry ground spices - 1 tsp. chilli powder, 1/2 tsp. turmeric powder, 1 tsp. curry powder,
- Salt to taste.

Method

In a flat non-stick pan on low heat, fry finely sliced potatoes, zucchini, onion, sweet potato, chopped green chillies until slightly brown then add ginger - garlic paste, salt, chopped coriander and dry ground spices, cover and simmer till vegetables are cooked. Then slice tomato and layer on top, cover and simmer for few minutes till slightly cooked. Finally break the eggs one by one on top or beat eggs in a bowl and pour over the vegetables, cover and simmer for few minutes till eggs are set. Cut in pieces and serve.

Machi-no-patio - gravy fish

- 8 pieces fish sliced or fillets,
- 1 can 410 gm. tomato puree,
- 1 can 400 ml. coconut milk,
- 2 stalks fresh curry leaves,
- 1 tbsp. peanut butter,
- 2 tsp. ginger - garlic paste,
- 4 tbsp. oil,
- Dry ground spices - 4 tbsp. coriander powder, 2 tbsp. cumin powder, 1 tsp. turmeric powder, 2 tsp. chilli powder or to taste, 2 tbsp. curry powder, 1 tsp. garam masala powder,

- Salt to taste.

Method

Fry ginger - garlic paste in oil, then on low heat add curry leaves, salt and all dry ground spices, mix well and let the spices fry for a couple of minutes on low heat. Then add peanut butter, coconut milk and tomato puree and let it simmer for a further ten minutes till nice thick consistency, then add the fish pieces with half a cup of water only if needed, and let it simmer until fish is cooked. The gravy should be of a nice thick consistency.

Usually eaten as an accompaniment to Dhandar or with khichree - boiled rice cooked with a teaspoon of turmeric powder and salt to taste.

Machi-no-sauce - sweet and sour fish sauce

Ingredients

- 8 pieces fish sliced or fillets,
- 1 medium onion,
- 4 cloves of garlic,
- 2 green chillies,
- 2 tsp. cumin powder,
- 2 tbsp. plain flour,
- 10 cherry tomatoes or 2 tomatoes chopped in pieces,
- 3-4 stalks coriander leaves
- 4 tbsp. oil,
- Salt to taste,
- Blend in a bowl and keep aside - 3 tbsp. malt vinegar, 2 tsp. sugar and one egg.

Method

Fry in oil finely chopped onion till light golden in colour, not brown, then add crushed garlic, finely chopped green chillies, coriander,

cumin powder, salt, cook for five minutes, then add flour and blend to a smooth paste, add a cup of water and mix well until smooth consistency, let it simmer for few minutes. Add tomatoes and fish pieces, cover and cook on medium heat until fish is cooked. Let the gravy cool a bit and then add the vinegar, sugar and egg mixture. Gently tilt the pan to allow mixture to flow evenly over fish. Cover the pan and simmer for a further five minutes before serving.

Usually served as a side dish on auspicious occasions or with khichree - boiled rice cooked with a teaspoon of turmeric powder and salt to taste.

Patra-ni-Machi - fish in banana leaf

Ingredients

- 8 pieces fish sliced or fillets,
- 2 tsp. chilli powder,
- 2 tsp. turmeric powder,
- 6 tbsp. grated coconut,
- 8-10 stalks of coriander leaves,
- 2 stalks of fresh mint leaves,
- 3 green chillies,
- 4 cloves of garlic,
- 2 tsp. cumin seeds,
- 2 tsp. sugar,
- 3 tbsp. lemon juice,
- 4 - 5 banana leaves,
- Salt to taste.

Method

Marinate the fish with salt, chilli and turmeric powder and leave aside. Grind all the remaining ingredients to a fine chutney consistency. Refrigerate for half an hour to let the chutney set a bit and easy to apply.

Wash and cut banana leaf into size and gently heat each leaf on stove in a flat iron pan - tavo to soften the leaf and avoid it from tearing whilst wrapping the fish. Apply chutney on both sides of the fish, then wrap the fish in the banana leaf closing all sides and tie with cooking twine or thread.

Heat the water in a steamer and when ready place the fish in, cover and cook until the fish is thoroughly cooked and ready to serve.

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