

RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF PARSIS

PARSI LIFE IS INTERWOVEN

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1. For a Parsi, social life is not different from religious life. The two are interwoven into one inextricable pattern. Social duties and obligations are, for a Parsi, religious duties and obligations, flowing from the commands of the Prophet Zarathushtra, preserved either in the Avesta Scriptures or through tradition and custom.
2. For instance, marriage is a religious sacrament, not a mere legal contract. It is a 'tarikāt', a path towards spiritual perfection. Marriage ceremony is not a mere external ritual formulated just for pomp and show. It is a spiritual ceremony in which a specially consecrated liquid "Nirang" is used. This liquid is prepared during a holy ceremony named Nirang-din, which takes 18 days to be performed and the final step of which is the recital of marathon Mantras from mid-night to morning. The same Nirang is used when the Navjote ceremony is performed on a Parsi child to give him the sacred Sudreh and Kushti.
3. Every Parsi is required to wear, by religious command, the white garment and girdle, called Sudreh and Kushti, throughout his life, wherever he is and whatever he does. This Sudreh-Kushti is not a mere symbol but a spiritual 'Alaat', an instrument of yoga and advancement. It is made in the prescribed manner and is to be untied and tied in a prescribed way.
4. Every Parsi is required by religious command to get the ceremonies of his deceased relatives performed. This not only helps the soul of the deceased to advance in his journey in the next world but also helps the living relatives spiritually. Special objects are used in the ceremonies which are to be performed only by the priests who are born in the family of Priests (called Athornan families) and have passed through certain initiating ceremonies called Navar-Maratab.
5. Every Parsi is required to offer prayers before the Holy Fires which are prepared, consecrated and enthroned after long and elaborate ceremonies.
6. A Parsi is socially and religiously commanded to lead an active and truthful married life in the service of his or her family, community, society, country and humanity. All the religious tenets and commands aforesaid are the prescriptions which liberate in him or her the spiritual energy and strength to discharge these duties.
7. These religious tenets, traditions and commands have certain inherent features. For instance, the sacred Fire in Fire Temple is specially made and consecrated after a long procedure; so also the Dokhma — the sacred Tower for the dead Parsis. These are regarded as the places of greatest sanctity. No non-Parsi is allowed to enter them. (Davar J. in 11 Bom. L. R. 85). This does not arise out of any disrespect for a non-Parsi, but is based on certain spiritual and ultra physical truths. It is beyond the scope of this article to set out here even a few glimpses of these truths. Just to give a faint indication here, they relate to certain phenomena and events, occurring in certain dimensions, which a non-saintly human intellect is incapable of knowing and even registering

in its consciousness. Some scientific discoveries furnish pointers towards such incomprehensible dimensions and events. Two books by a biologist Dr. Lyll Watson "Super Nature" and "Romeo Error", set out some of such pointers.

8. The subject touches the terminal frontiers of (i) modern Physics, like wave mechanics, quantum physics, nuclear phenomena, and elementary particles of matter; (ii) the science of genetics; (iii) the sciences relating to human brain; and (iv) Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) and para normal or psychic phenomena.

9. The days of just mocking away as unscientific, the ultra-physical and spiritual events, are now over. When Extra Sensory Perception is an established fact, when Psychotronic Generators are found to work, when the individual psychic composition and constitution of the experimenter is found to enter into and affect his experiment, it is not unscientific or superstitious to accept the truth that religious practices and ceremonies are based on deeper and more profound laws than those discovered by physical sciences. Laws of ultra-physical and spiritual consonance and wave disturbance are amongst those laws on which the ceremonies ordained in the Zoroastrian Religion are formulated and constituted, and the disabilities relating to the entry into, and attendance at, certain religious and sacred places arise out of these Laws.

10. Such disabilities are not confined merely to non-Parsis; it applies equally to Parsis in certain sets of circumstances. For instance, in the interior room of a holy Fire-Temple, where the Fire is made to burn permanently, only a Mobed (Priest) can enter; the other worshippers cannot go in. In the interior room of 'Atash-Beheram', only a Mobed having passed through certain ceremony (known as 'Khoop')

can enter; no other Priest even, can go in. Major ceremonies like "Yazasney", "Vedidad", "Nirangdin", are performed in specially isolated places and no other Parsi can step in there.

11. All these commands and traditions point to one very significant truth, namely, a Parsi can be a Parsi only by birth and not by adoption or conversion or absorption. There cannot be in the very nature of things a converted Parsi or non-Parsi child adopted to become a Parsi. Such a concept is entirely incompatible with the social and religious structure of the community and any intrusion by such adoption, or conversion, would lead to the breakdown of the whole structure. That is the reason why the Parsis have insisted on racial purity and have resisted all attempts to thrust converts on them, and have opposed any kind of genetic mix-up in the community, as pointed out emphatically by Justice Davar in 11 Bom. L. R. 85.

12. Our strength has never been in numbers. Our spiritual and religious equipments are the only sources of all energies and the only secret of our survival for 12 centuries in this great country. External stamping of large numbers as Parsi without the inherent genetic and racial characteristics would never lead to survival. It will only accelerate a complete mix-up and therefore total wiping out of the Community.

13. A suggestion was, and is still being, made that the Adoption Bill could have an amendment whereby the adopted child would get only the social rights and not the religious rights vested in the parents. This, however, is not practicable in day-to-day life from the view point of the community as also the parents and the child.

14. As shown in the preceding paragraphs, the social life of a Parsi is so much interwoven with Religion that such a distinction would

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not be workable. The poor non-Parsi child would prove a misfit outside as well as inside the family. The community and the parents would face innumerable embarrassing situations.

15. And above all the child would have to endure a miserable plight. He (or she) would have to be kept aloof from all socio-religious activities and functions. He would not be able to enter a Fire-Temple; he would be left outside when his adoptive parents and his friends would go in. If the parents are poor and desire to educate the child with the help of Parsi Charitable Trusts, their doors would be closed for the child.

16. And the worst is that such an adopted

son or daughter would not be able to get the death ceremonies performed of his or her parent. He or she would not be able even to be near the dead body of his or her parent nor would he or she be able to remain present when the ceremonies are being performed. Since performance of death ceremonies of the parents is the chief duty of a Palak son according to Religion, a non-Parsi adoption, where the adopted son or daughter is restrained from doing so, would be contrary to the very concept of Palak and therefore ultra-vires.

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